

Tests

TYRES
CORKSCREWS
TOASTERS
WASHING MACHINES

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PAINKILLERS

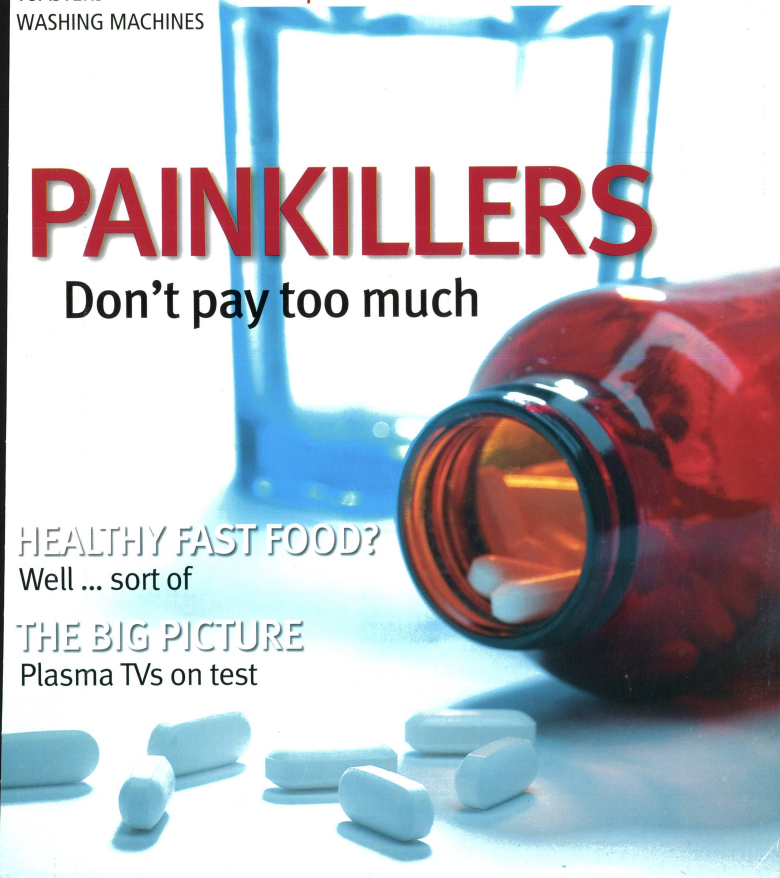
Don't pay too much

HEALTHY FAST FOOD?

Well ... sort of

THE BIG PICTURE

Plasma TVs on test



COMING SOON ...

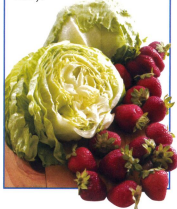
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Pesticide in food

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Image vs reality

Finally — whether prompted by genuine concerns for community health or fears of obesity-related litigation — most fast-food giants (and many smaller chains) have started to promote new, apparently healthier ranges of food options.

With words like 'salad', 'deli', 'vegie' and 'baguette' in their names they certainly sound healthier than burgers and fries, and many of them are. Full marks to the fast-foodies for trying.

Where you might come undone is thinking these new ranges are all automatically healthier than the old fast food. First, they don't all claim to be — they just claim to be different. But they certainly look a lot different from our concept of fast food and much more in line with our perceptions of what's healthier to eat.

If you're trying to avoid burgers and fries you want to be sure that what you're ordering instead is lower in fat, kilojoules, salt, etc., than that Big Mac or KFC Original fillet burger. What we found when we checked is that you can't be certain — a few of the new-age fast foods have as much fat and salt as they do, and lots are only a little better.

So don't let the image fool you. You can now get healthier food in fast-food chains than you used to, but you still have to choose it carefully by checking its nutrition content (which you can sometimes do in-store, or on their websites). Otherwise reality could still bite in terms of your diet.



Jane Mackenzie
Editor

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The free website exclusive to CHOICE magazine subscribers, with a four-year index and links to many articles online.

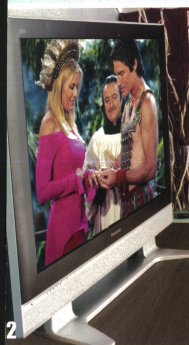
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To use this free website you'll need to log in with your subscriber number, which is the number directly above your name on the mailing label that comes with the magazine.



All you need is the model name and number you want to buy, the price you want to beat, and your CHOICE subscriber number (from the mailing label with the magazine). CHOICE Shopper is available to personal subscribers only.

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How to choose from the dozens available.

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Scourer (in rank order)

	Overall rating (%)	Price per scourer (\$)*
VILEDA Active Scourer	74	1.98
SCOTCH-BRITE Multi-Purpose	72	1.23
COLES SMART BUY Soft Scourer Sponge	70	0.92
EDCO Scour Sponge	70	0.59
OATES Scour 'n' sponge	69	0.64
CHUX Non-scratch Kitchen Scrub	68	0.75
COLES SMART BUY Scourer Sponge	67	0.50
POWERFORCE Sponge Scourer (Aldi)	63	0.30
MULTI Sponge Scourer	62	0.32
HOME BRAND Scourer Sponge	59	0.34
CHUX All-purpose Scrub Sponge	57	2.24
TUF Scourer Sponge	55	0.29

* Based on the recommended retail price in February 2006.

Sniff out a scam

The old adage, "If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is", has never been more applicable than it is to sniffing out an attempt to deprive you of your hard-earned money.

Whether it's in the real world or online, scams are becoming increasingly sophisticated. And once you've been stung, it can be hard to get your money back. The scammers generally operate from overseas and they move fast — chances are they'll have taken your money and moved on by the time you realise what's happened.

Most scams fall into the following categories:

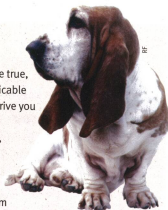
- **Advance fee scams** — you're asked to send money upfront with the promise of receiving a much bigger payback later. Pyramid schemes and lottery scams fall into this category, as does the infamous Nigerian scam.
- **Mis-sold goods or investments** — can take the form of telemarketing calls, advertising or emails. Generally spruiking goods or investments, these scams promise the world but don't deliver.
- **Phishing** — seemingly legitimate emails instructing you to click a link that leads to a fraudulent website designed to steal usernames and passwords. Phishing scams often target bank customers but can also include those of other financial sites, auctions and online job boards.

So how do you know if an offer's genuine? Don't be pressured into making a hasty decision. Research or investigate the company or opportunity and watch out for telltale scam signs:

- A promise to get rich quick with little effort or risk.
- A request for personal information by clicking on a link in an email.
- Free gifts or prizes from competitions you don't recall entering.

If you suspect a scam, your best defence is to delete it, destroy it or hang up.

If you're unsure or you want to report a scam, contact the Australasian Consumer Fraud Taskforce at www.scamwatch.gov.au.



GENE EDDIS

CHOICE
HOME
TESTER

Up to scratch

With the latest in plasma TV technology (page 12) to contemplate, it's often easy to forget the small things in life — like scourer sponges. But CHOICE aims to advise you on what's best in whatever you buy, from a sleek new appliance down to the humble sponge.

So in the name of research, 444 Home Testers donned their washing-up gear to trial scourer sponges, using them to clean a range of items including glassware, cups, utensils, dishes and lightly and heavily soiled pots/pans. Twelve different products were trialled, each one by between 33 and 41 people over a three-week period.

The outcome — in addition to many draining racks of clean dishes — is that there's not a great deal of difference between most of them. The top two overall were the **VILEDA** Active (\$1.98 for one) and **SCOTCH-BRITE** Multi Purpose (\$1.23 for one). However, for the price of one **VILEDA** you can get three or four **EDCO**, **OATES** or **COLES** scourer sponges (at 59, 64 and 50 cents each, respectively) and it's likely you'll be just as happy with the results.

At these prices they're all pretty cheap to replace when they wear out. But if you tend to run them ragged before you're prompted to add them to the shopping list, you might get more washes for your money with a **COLES Soft Scourer** (92 cents each). According to our Home Testers it was the most durable sponge/scourer product overall.

The overall rating in the table is the average score received by a product on a scale from 0 (very poor) through 5 (OK) to 10 (excellent), converted to a percentage.

Identity fraud is a real risk

Identity theft can have serious financial consequences, including damage to your ability to get credit that can be difficult to fix, says CHOICE *Money & Rights*, Feb/Mar 2006.

Identity theft is the misuse of your personal details to commit financial fraud. Thieves may use your online account or credit card details to make fraudulent transactions or fully take over your identity — applying for credit, buying goods or opening accounts in your name.

Eight per cent of the 903 participants in a recent Australian survey said they'd been victims of identity theft. These survey results show it's already a serious problem.

Money & Rights says poor business practices are the root cause of identity theft in Australia and existing privacy laws aren't doing enough to protect consumers. While fraudsters may try to steal your personal information directly from you, it's much more effective for them to fraudulently access the details of thousands of consumers via vulnerable business databases.

One such security breach happened in June 2005, when the public was told about a credit card security breach affecting 40 million credit cards worldwide,

including 130,000 in Australia. Police in Victoria have reported finding personal data dumped in back lanes behind hotels and businesses.

Money & Rights is calling for better business practices and says privacy laws should be amended to make businesses more responsible for protecting sensitive data in the more dangerous electronic environment in which they now operate.

Steps you can take to protect yourself include:

- Provide businesses with necessary information only.
- Order a copy of your credit report once a year.
- Thoroughly check bank statements.
- Store personal information securely at home.
- Fit a lock to your mailbox.

For the full report, including a checklist and steps to take if you become a victim of identity fraud, subscribe to CHOICE *Money & Rights*. Call 1800 069 552 toll-free or go to www.choice.com.au/magazines.



More on warranties

Warranties are an intricate subject that always raises new questions. So here's the lowdown on a few interesting tidbits you asked about.

When you get a product replaced under warranty, shouldn't the replacement product be guaranteed for the same length of time as the original purchase? When Dory from Brassall, Queensland, had problems with a **SUNBEAM Mixmaster** she'd already exchanged once, she was surprised to hear the retailer wouldn't replace it again as it couldn't locate the problem and the original warranty had expired. "Is this legal?" she asks.

The answer is, as so often: it depends. If a replacement product is defective or fails to meet one of the basic consumer guarantees, you're entitled to a refund from the retailer under your statutory warranty rights (for more on these, see CHOICE, December 2005).

An alternative is to get a replacement under the manufacturer's warranty, in which case you'd sort the matter out with the manufacturer directly or one of its service agents. **SUNBEAM** told us retailers tend to honour the manufacturer's warranty only for

the time stipulated in the original product's warranty, whereas the manufacturer's warranty covers a replacement product from the day it's supplied, generally for 12 months. So keep the receipt of the exchange transaction as well, and contact the manufacturer or agent if the retailer won't extend the original manufacturer's warranty.

Sheena from Sheffield, Tasmania, questions the value of **TUPPERWARE's** 'lifetime guarantee', as she only received a credit of the original purchase price rather than a similar replacement product. While credit for an item that's no longer made mightn't be what she wanted, it's in line with the terms and conditions of the guarantee — and probably more than many other manufacturers would offer.

When an item that's to be replaced is no longer made, **TUPPERWARE Australia** says it will provide a full credit, up to the value of its last recommended retail price, towards the purchase of a new item. All the nitty-gritty bits about the guarantee are listed in detail on the company's website (www.tupperware.com.au).



When the retailer wouldn't replace a second faulty Sunbeam Mixmaster under the original purchase warranty, Dory had to go straight to the manufacturer for replacement parts.

CORRECTION

DISHWASHERS

CHOICE, Jan/Feb 2006
In footnote (C) on page 42 we said the MAYTAG MJD3005ANW had been discontinued. In fact only the MJD2000AAW and MJD3000AAW have been discontinued (though you may still find some in shops); the MJD3005ANW is still available.

Changed your life?

A big thank you to all of you who wrote in after our request last year to tell us how CHOICE has affected your life or habits. It's great to hear that so many of you consult CHOICE before buying products and services and base your purchase decisions on our advice.

Many of you sent us long lists of products you've bought on our recommendations, ranging from the all-important whitegoods to all types of insurance, baby products and everyday stuff such as detergent, toothpaste and moisturiser.

The quotes below give a flavour of what you think of us, but Karl summed it up nicely: "I've recovered many times over the money spent in subscription, saving money, avoiding problems, gaining knowledge. CHOICE magazine has really changed the way our family goes about buying (which appliance to buy and why) and learning things about insurance, new recording technology or how to prepare a proper cup of coffee."

Knowing what to look for or ask can be as valuable as having a product recommended — a few of you made that point. As Karen said: "Your articles have taken the legwork out of expensive trial-and-error purchases and empowered me by providing knowledge. This in turn has enabled me to at least ask the right questions."

And AJ gave us an unusual example: when he had cataracts in the 1990s, he had a long-range intra-optical lens implanted into one eye. Just before having his second eye treated, in a CHOICE article about contact lenses he read about monovision lenses (one long-range for one eye, one short/reading-range for the other). He asked the specialist to do the same with the implanted lenses and hasn't worn glasses since.

Britta told us about her son, who grew up checking food labels fastidiously to avoid certain additives because he had asthma. After an unexpected asthma attack, he was able to quickly pinpoint the source of the problem, simply by checking the labels of the new foods he'd just eaten. "We simply wouldn't have known what to do in that situation had it not been for CHOICE."

Kimberley, ready to start a family, read about the importance of folate in her diet just as she'd bought the supplement. "I now know that I was only getting half my required daily 'dosage' (what a great idea to have a quiz) and how much I needed to increase it."

And Val, about to change to a lower-interest credit card, said she's become savvier in her dealings with banks. "I'm now willing to stand up for my rights."

Thanks again for all your letters and emails — it's great to work for such appreciative subscribers.



WORLD CONSUMER SNAPSHOT

FRESH ISN'T ALWAYS BETTER

The often held view that fresh tomatoes are healthier doesn't hold for all nutrients, Germany's *Test* magazine reports. When it tested canned tomatoes, whole and in pieces, and puréed tomatoes (passata), it found that the processed product contained more lycopene and beta-carotene (antioxidants that may help protect against cancer) than fresh tomatoes. In fact the higher the processing level, the more lycopene the product contained — cutting and heating the tomatoes apparently opens up their cells, making the lycopene more readily available. Puréed tomatoes had the most (14 mg per 100 g), tinned tomato pieces around 11 mg and tinned whole tomatoes almost 10 mg. Fresh tomatoes, on the other hand, have on average up to 5.8 mg of lycopene per 100 g.

FAKE DIAMONDS

Fake diamonds are becoming increasingly common, reports NZ *Consumer* magazine. They're bought overseas, from travelling traders or over the internet. They're either completely fake (synthetic cubic zirconia or synthetic moissanite) or poor-grade real diamonds that are 'fracture filled' with polymers to hide cracks. "The differences between an expensive diamond and a cheapie or a fake are subtle. You can't pick them with an untrained eye, and you certainly can't pick them over the internet," says the magazine. So buy locally, it recommends. "After all, diamonds are forever."

GENUINE FAKE

Talking about fake, an entry from the US *Consumer Reports*' 'Selling it' page (the equivalent of our Hard Word) caught our attention: an ad that offered 'a FREE GENUINE faux 9 Carat Sapphire Pendant'. "Using logic," remarks the magazine, "would a FAKE FAUX sapphire be genuine? And if your genuine faux is genuinely free, as the large type states, why should anyone fork over \$9.95, the price the small type indicates for 'shipping, handling & insurance'?"

yourletters

NOT ADDING UP

As it became increasingly difficult for me to help my son with his maths homework I began looking into getting him some outside help. I found that tutors cost around \$30–\$35 for a lesson and thought my son would need around three lessons a week, which I couldn't afford. I also looked at some maths centres and discovered you had to sign up for a minimum of six months at a cost of around \$1300, and you had to keep going in the holidays.

I then contacted an educational software company that advertised on the radio. They sent a sales rep to my house to do a free demonstration of their maths tuition software, and a teacher friend of mine sat in on the session. She told me it hardly covered any of the syllabus and it was just direct-entry answers, so the kids don't do the working out. There were hardly any

explanations, except for a brief written explanation on the screen that was occasionally read aloud in a South African accent.

It was totally boring and the worst part was you had to buy either the whole primary section or the whole high school section for \$5400. They say they'll give you a "money-back guarantee" if your child's maths performance doesn't improve. But it's not "money-back" at all. Instead they say they will pay for maths tuition for your child if their marks haven't improved, but the eligibility requirements to qualify for this seem impossible to uphold. The company also claimed it had been reviewed by the authorities for schools in NSW and graded as highly recommended. When I rang the Department of Education I found out this wasn't true.

Within three weeks I was phoned by two other educational software companies

and they came around to do demonstrations. They were priced nearly the same and just as atrocious. The reps spend ages getting friendly with the kids, helping them with what's on the screen, but when they're not there who would give the explanations? Their programs certainly don't.

They all offer phone tutor support but these are mainly uni students, often studying engineering not maths teaching.

The sales tactics are really aggressive as they try to pressure you to sign up on the spot.

I've now managed to qualify another computer program that works well for my son and follows the Australian syllabus. This company didn't try to send a sales rep to my house and they put the price up on their website, unlike the other companies that wouldn't even give me the price over the phone.

Maddie Tourgellis
Claremont Meadows, NSW

We contacted the NSW Department of Education and Training and it confirmed that it didn't endorse the educational software program in question and had taken the matter to the Office of Fair Trading to stop the company from continuing to make the claim. As always, we'd advise being wary of aggressive sales tactics and companies that refuse to give their prices over the phone.

THUMBS UP!



■ John Shore bought a portable DVD player from JB Hi-Fi in Miranda, NSW, with the hope of entertaining his son during the family's upcoming drive to Melbourne, only to find it to be faulty.

When he returned it to the store he was told the repair could take six to eight weeks. After explaining to the manager that he wanted the player for his family's holiday, it was exchanged for a new DVD player on the spot.

■ When one of the controls on Judy White's electric blanket broke, she contacted SUNBEAM to find out where she could buy a replacement. In less than a week SUNBEAM sent out two complimentary controls for either side of her queen-size blanket, even though it wasn't under warranty.

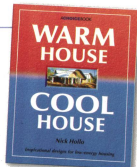


LETTER OF THE MONTH

We want to hear from you — your experiences help our research and often let other readers know about scams and rip-offs. Positive outcomes you've had to a complaint you took to a manufacturer, retailer, importer or tradesperson interest us too. Address these letters to *Thumbs Up* at the address on page 2.

To thank you for writing to us, *Your Letters* awards a prize of a CHOICE book to the 'Letter of the month'. This month's winner, Maddie Tourgellis of Claremont Meadows, NSW, receives *Warm House, Cool House* or any other book of her choice from Consumer Bookshelf, page 48.

We're sorry we don't have the resources to answer all your letters personally, and in the magazine we may edit them or print only an extract. See page 2 for how to reach us.



FLYBUYS WOES

I've had a FlyBuys card for the last three years. A couple of months ago I decided to look at what I could get with my points, as the first of them would be expiring soon. What a disappointment (tongue firmly in cheek there) to find there was nothing I could afford.

I was sufficiently motivated to work out exactly how much money I would need to spend at the relevant stores to earn enough points for the cheapest reward item. It came out at just under three times my annual income as a single disability pensioner. So it's not really worthwhile for me to use my card until councils and utility suppliers start offering FlyBuys. By which time, of course, the cheapest items will probably cost more.

M Townsend
Wynyard, Tasmania

The Big Mac you have...

... when you're not having a Big Mac.

IN A NUTSHELL

■ We dish the dirt on which fast-food 'lighter options' mean you might as well have gone with a Big Mac.

■ 10 of the best 'healthy' options and 10 of the worst.

Healthy is the new fast-food black: if they're not reinventing their restaurants with a complete menu makeover, they're adding 'lighter options' to appeal to customers who generally avoid fast food fat and certainly don't want fries with that.

If you find yourself in Macca's or Hungry Jack's or even one of the new breed of 'healthy' fast food chains, can you be sure that all their lighter options are lighter than a Big Mac? While there are plenty of healthy choices, don't bet on them all.

10 OF THE WORST

Nothing out-whops a **HUNGRY JACK'S Whopper** when it comes to fat and salt — unless it's a **Double Whopper with Cheese** — but we found three 'healthy' options that manage to out-Mac a Big Mac and seven more that come close. All 10 are fatter than a KFC Original Fillet Burger and seven have more salt.

Here's our 'healthy' fast-food hall of shame (worst first):

- **HUNGRY JACK'S Country Chicken Baguette.**
- **SUMO SALAD Grilled Chicken Caesar Salad** — with small-size dressing.
- **HUNGRY JACK'S Caesar Salad with Chicken and Dressing.**
- **HUNGRY JACK'S Veggie Supreme Baguette**
- **McDONALD'S Italian Supreme Deli Choice.**
- **McDONALD'S Bacon & Egg Deli Choice.**
- **HUNGRY JACK'S Salad with Dressing.**
- **McDONALD'S Chicken Caesar Deli Choice.**
- **McDONALD'S Crispy Cut Salad with Spicy Avocado Dressing.**
- **HUNGRY JACK'S Grilled Chicken Baguette.**

These 10 all have a tablespoon of fat or more, the top three around one-and-a-half (beating a Big Mac), and all have more salt than a Big Mac. That's more than a third of the maximum daily amount recommended for salt — most in fact much more than that, at around half the recommended limit. See the table on page 10 for more details. They're not the worst choices on the menu as a whole (the extra salad is a fast-food fibre bonus), but they don't really live up to their image — and the very high salt content can be hard to balance out, even in an otherwise healthy diet.

10 OF THE BEST

Fortunately if you know what you're looking for, there's an increasing number of options that only the most



PHOTO: GUY FOS

ferocious dietitian would be too disturbed about. All have around two teaspoons of fat or less and none has more than one quarter of the upper daily salt recommendation. This doesn't mean they're low in sodium — you won't have much luck on that score in a fast-food place — but they're not too over-the-top.

Our best picks are (best first):

- **McDONALD'S Garden Mixed Salad with French Dressing.**
- **SUBWAY Veggie Delite 6"** under 6 g fat.
- **SUMO SALAD Spicy BBQ Prawn Salad** — with small dressing.
- **HEALTHY HABITS Tuna & Salad Sandwich** (on multigrain bread).
- **PURE & NATURAL Layered Vegetable Frittata.**
- **SUMO SALAD Malaysian Beef Salad** — with small dressing.
- **SUMO SALAD Tandoori Chicken Wrap** — half.
- **SUMO SALAD Pumpkin Pinenut Wrap** — half.
- **SUMO SALAD Moroccan Lamb Salad** — with small dressing.
- **HEALTHY HABITS Linseed Wrap with Sweet Chilli Chicken, Lettuce, Carrot, Cucumber and Mayonnaise.**

Not all the chains we looked at got into our 'best' list, but most do have some better choices available. Here's the best of the rest.

KFC

KFC offers an **Original Fillet Salad** (with dressing) that only has two teaspoons of fat — but it packs in the salt: over 40% of the daily maximum. KFC is also trialling a new product called **Boneless Chicken**, a coated chicken fillet product using breast, thigh and drum fillets that has less than half the fat of a serve of **Original Recipe** chicken.



SUBWAY

SUBWAY has eight subs on offer with no more than six grams of fat (a little over a teaspoon or less). No SUBWAY lower-fat offering made it into our worst list, and one made the best list. The other seven missed out because they have about 30% or more of the maximum recommended salt for a day in one sub.

Take care when ordering other subs or wraps on its menu — many have one or even one-and-a-half tablespoons of fat, and plenty of salt too.

MCDONALD'S

Here's a fast-food giant that's really been trying to reinvent itself and deflect criticism about the nutritional quality of its food. All the items on the **Salads Plus** menu are a better choice than a Big Mac — they have less than two teaspoons of fat per serve, but all but one missed our best list because of the salt content.

But watch out for some of the new healthy-sounding **Deli Choices**. Most have salad ingredients, but they're not necessarily lower in fat or salt — a few made it into our worst list.

McDONALD'S new warm salad range — **Crispy Cut** and **Herb Fusion** salads — aren't part of the **Salads Plus** range. **Herb Fusion** is low in fat — less than one teaspoon — but it's still high in salt. And **Crispy Cut** made it into our worst list when teamed with the higher-fat **Spicy Avocado Dressing**.

HUNGRY JACK'S

What can you say about a chain that tells us its baguettes are its healthy option, but manages to cram seven teaspoons of fat and nearly 60% of the daily salt limit into its **Country Chicken Baguette**?

Continued on page 11

What made the grade?

To make our Top 10 best choices a product had to have around two teaspoons of fat or less per serve and give you less than one quarter of the daily recommended limit for sodium (from salt) — see *How much a day?*, below right. This is a fairly generous cut-off for salt, but if we were tougher nothing much would have made the list.

The meals in the Worst 10 list are up there with **McDONALD'S Big Macs** and **KFC Chicken Fillet Burgers**. They all have one tablespoon of fat or more per serve, some one-and-a-half. All have more than one third of the daily upper recommended limit for sodium, most more than half.

If you're looking for fast food, it always pays to go for something with heaps of salad or vegies in it: you may still be getting fat and salt, but at least there's some fibre and vegie goodness there as well. Watch the dressings, too, unless you're sure they're low-fat and not packed with salt.

The products we looked at are those which the chains suggest are in some way their healthier or lighter, fresher options. They may not specifically claim to be lower in fat or salt, but they present a healthier image.

We only included a selection of menu items that have nutrition information available and are portable fast food, rather than sit-down options. We didn't include some very small items (such as small spring rolls and side dishes).

Where dressing is available we assumed you'd have some, but if there's a smaller size, we used that. **SUMO SALAD** offers half or full wraps; we assessed half wraps, which are closer to the serve size of a **Big Mac**, but included its regular-size salads.

HOW MUCH A DAY?

- An average woman should be aiming for no more than 70 g fat per day, an average man 90 g. One teaspoon of fat is 5 g, one tablespoon 20 g, or four teaspoons.
- The daily recommended maximum sodium intake for adults is 2300 mg.

'HEALTHY OPTIONS': WORST TO BEST

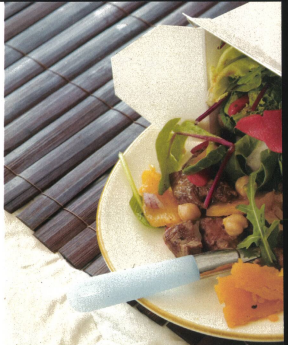
Brand / product (in order of total fat, most to least, then salt, most to least)*

THE WORST

Brand / product	Total fat (g / serve)	Sodium (mg / serve)	Sodium (% upper RDI)	Energy (kJ / serve)	Serve size (g)
HUNGRY JACK'S Whopper (A)	39	930	41	2740	270
HUNGRY JACK'S Country chicken baguette	35	1320	57	2760	220
SUMO SALAD Grilled chicken caesar salad (with small dressing)	31	870	38	1960	285
HUNGRY JACK'S Caesar salad with chicken & dressing	28	1820	79	1860	250
MCDONALD'S Big Mac (A)	25	800	35	2010	200
HUNGRY JACK'S Veggie supreme baguette	23	1330	58	2250	235
MCDONALD'S Italian supreme Deli Choice	23	1190	52	1970	250
MCDONALD'S Chicken Caesar Deli Choice	21	1370	60	2360	245
HUNGRY JACK'S Salad with dressing	21	1260	55	1370	185
MCDONALD'S Bacon & egg Deli Choice	21	1210	53	2080	200
MCDONALD'S Crispy cut salad with spicy avocado dressing	21	900	39	1470	285
HUNGRY JACK'S Grilled chicken baguette	20	1050	45	1850	225
KFC Original fillet burger (A)	18	1090	47	1900	210

THE REST

SUMO SALAD Pumpkin & pinenut salad (with small dressing)	26	500	22	1170	310
SUMO SALAD Lemon & herb roasted chicken salad (with small dressing)	24	270	12	1466	305
PURE & NATURAL Chicken satay filo	18	720	31	2020	325
JESTERS Gorbachomp pie	17	510	22	1420	175
JESTERS Taj Mahal pie	16	560	24	1420	175
MCDONALD'S Mustard beef Deli Choice	15	1350	59	1760	265
PURE & NATURAL Spinach & ricotta filo pastry	15	630	27	1430	180
SUMO SALAD Chicken caesar wrap (half)	14	640	28	1180	160
KFC Boneless chicken	13	ns	ns	1060	115
JESTERS Ned Kelly pie	13	520	23	1220	175
SUMO SALAD Tandoori chicken salad (with small dressing)	13	270	12	910	390
PURE & NATURAL Tuna, chive & black olive q'tata (B)	12	990	43	1120	180
HEALTHY HABITS Linseed wrap with Cajun chicken, lettuce, onion, cucumber, tomato & tzatziki	12	830	36	1940	430
PURE & NATURAL Basil, tomato & fetta q'tata (B)	11	740	32	960	180
HUNGRY JACK'S Steak sandwich baguette	10	1330	58	2140	250
SUMO SALAD Smoked salmon & goat's cheese salad (with small dressing)	10	990	43	920	330
KFC Original fillet salad bowl with dressing	10	950	41	990	270
MCDONALD'S Veggie pesto Deli Choice	10	850	37	1510	270
PURE & NATURAL Sweet chilli & chicken q'tata (B)	9	810	35	1050	180
PURE & NATURAL Greek spinach filo	9	720	31	900	185
MCDONALD'S Lean beef burger	9	660	29	1250	175
HUNGRY JACK'S Spicy chicken baguette	8	980	43	1620	235
MCDONALD'S Thai chicken Deli Choice	8	950	41	1480	240
MCDONALD'S Turkey & cranberry Deli Choice	8	920	40	1780	235
PURE & NATURAL Thai chicken & coriander q'tata (B)	8	850	37	950	180
PURE & NATURAL Spinach & corn q'tata (B)	8	700	31	870	180
PURE & NATURAL Ham & zucchini frittata	8	680	30	840	215
MCDONALD'S Chicken tandoori Deli Choice	7	1190	52	1400	240
MCDONALD'S Roast chicken salad with mango & sesame dressing	7	640	28	1040	335
SUBWAY Turkey 6" under 6 g fat	6	980	43	1160	205
HEALTHY HABITS Roast beef baguette with lettuce, tomato, onion & English mustard	6	950	41	1690	350





Brand / product (in order of total fat, most to least, then salt, most to least), continued *

	Total fat (g / serve)	Sodium (mg / serve)	Sodium (% upper RDI)	Energy (kJ / serve)	Serve size (g)
SUBWAY Sweet onion chicken teriyaki 6" under 6 g fat	5	1460	63	1540	265
HEALTHY HABITS Turkey baguette with lettuce, tomato, cranberry sauce, cucumber & onion	5	1380	60	1930	435
SUBWAY Club 6" under 6 g fat	5	1230	53	1210	220
SUBWAY Ham 6" under 6 g fat	5	1150	50	1170	210
SUBWAY Roast beef 6" under 6 g fat	5	1110	48	1150	210
SUBWAY Turkey & ham 6" under 6 g fat	5	1080	47	1160	205
HEALTHY HABITS Plain chicken baguette with lettuce, tomato, onion, carrot, cucumber & plain mayonnaise	5	930	41	2190	510
SUBWAY Roasted chicken 6" under 6 g fat	5	710	31	1280	225
MCDONALD'S Herb fusion salad (with teriyaki dressing)	3	920	40	590	260
THE BEST					
HEALTHY HABITS Linseed wrap with sweet chilli chicken, lettuce, carrot, cucumber & plain mayonnaise	12	380	16	1880	385
SUMO SALAD Moroccan lamb salad (with small dressing)	11	370	16	1210	365
SUMO SALAD Pumpkin & pinenut wrap (half)	11	490	21	940	160
SUMO SALAD Tandoori chicken wrap (half)	10	480	21	900	155
SUMO SALAD Malaysian beef salad (with small dressing)	10	260	11	1150	350
PURE & NATURAL Layered vegetable frittata	8	200	9	1110	380
HEALTHY HABITS Tuna & salad sandwich (on multigrain bread)	7	570	25	1130	465
SUMO SALAD Spicy BBQ prawn salad (with small dressing)	6	540	24	700	295
SUBWAY Veggie delite 6" under 6 g fat	4	540	24	960	160
MCDONALD'S Garden mixed salad with French dressing	4	350	15	380	190

Continued from page 9

All is not completely lost, however. **HUNGRY JACK'S** Steak Sandwich Baguette and **Spicy Chicken Baguette** would have made it into our best list if it weren't for the large whack of salt they provide. With only two teaspoons of fat, both are a better choice than a Whopper.

JESTERS

A pie shop with pies that the National Heart Foundation will tick? Yes, though only one sweet and three savoury pies (listed in the table) make the grade, so don't assume all their pies get the tick.

However, the ticked pies are not all that magically different gram for gram from some of the other pies on the menu — they're just smaller (175 g vs 200 g).

PURE & NATURAL

This is a chain with a healthy image — its catchcry is "fast fresh 100% healthy food". In general most of the offerings we looked at were better than average, and all but the **Chicken Satay Filo** were heading for the best but the salt content knocked most of them out.

HEALTHY HABITS

HEALTHY HABITS claims to be "a cut above the rest", and given how big their wraps and rolls are (400–500 g), it's impressive that all those we looked at just barely topped the two-teaspoons-of-fat mark. What kept most of them off our best list was the salt content: one teaspoon of fat in a huge roll is impressive, but when it comes with 40% or even 60% of the maximum recommended daily salt, not so good.

SUMO SALAD

With its funky packaging, complete with New-York-style Chinese takeaway containers and chopsticks, you feel cool and healthy just buying something from **SUMO SALAD**. Five of its offerings made it into our best list, but the two wraps only get there if you buy the smaller half-serve size, and the salads only with the small dressing option. More of the salads and wraps would have made it in if it weren't for the salt content, although a couple are pretty heavy on the fat and one made it into the worst list for that reason. They're packed with veggies, though, and that's a good thing. ■

Figures are rounded to the nearest
± g fat, 10 mg sodium, 10 kJ
energy and 5 g serve sizes.

RDI Recommended daily intake.

* **KFC**, **Hungry Jack's**, **McDonald's** and **Subway** are available in all states. **Sumo Salad** has stores in NSW and Victoria (and one in Brisbane) — www.sumosalad.com has details. **Pure and Natural** isn't in Tasmania or the NT (www.purenat.com.au). **Jesters** has stores in NSW, Victoria and WA (www.jesters.com.au). **Healthy Habits** is in Victoria and Queensland, plus one store in each of the ACT, NSW and SA (www.healthyhabits.com.au).

ns Not stated.

(A) Not marketed as a healthy option, but included for comparison.

(B) A q'tata is a kind of cross between a quiche and a frittata.



GEORGE ROSS/AMERICA'S PRESS

THE BOLD AND THE BEAUTIFUL

What to look for in a plasma TV.

IN A NUTSHELL

- Picture quality isn't just a matter of higher resolution — trust your eyes, not specifications.
- Just because the TV can accept a high-definition digital input doesn't mean its screen can produce a high-definition picture.
- Plasma screens can suffer from image retention and can age inconsistently across the screen. It's a good idea to have features that help to manage these issues.

The appeal of plasma is easy to appreciate when standing in front of eight screens each over a metre wide, as we did during our testing. In a lounge room you're only likely to have the one, but when it's on there'll be little else that can compete for your attention.

On the other hand, seeing them all together makes it very clear that all plasma screens aren't equal. Their picture and sound quality vary, and a higher price doesn't necessarily mean you're getting a better product. But they are expensive, so we've been very careful to look for the small differences that make the difference between a good screen and a better one.

TRANSLATING THE IMAGE

Before the advent of plasma and LCD TV, image quality was pretty simple — all TVs had the same resolution (the amount of detail the screen can display).

This is no longer the case. Different TV sets will have different resolutions and, to complicate the matter further, we now have new sources such as HDTV (high-definition TV) and DVD with different resolutions. The TV has to be able to take the picture from the source and convert it to its own resolution, otherwise you'll end up with a really poor image. It's how well they make this conversion that can make the difference between TVs, regardless of their resolution.

It's not unreasonable to expect a higher-resolution TV to provide a better picture, especially if it costs substantially more, but it's not a given. Always trust your eyes when buying a TV, regardless of its cost or specifications. With the change to the newer technologies, it's more important than ever to see the TV working with as many picture sources as is practical.

THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

All the TVs in this test have a normal analogue TV tuner, just like we've been used to for over 50 years; only the LG also has a digital tuner. This means you can treat them like any TV and just plug them into your existing aerial. However, if you do this you'll probably have to use the TV's stretch or zoom function to fill the screen, as almost all analogue broadcasts are in 4:3 aspect (width-to-height) ratio, whereas these TVs are widescreen (16:9) format. Also, you'll be missing out on some of the advantages of digital TV, such as better picture and sound as well as some extra channels.

Given the size of these screens (106 cm) we think it would be wise to figure in the cost of a standard-definition set-top box (STB) to convert

the digital signals to analogue (except for the LG). These start at around \$150 or less. Only the **HITACHI** TV tested can display a high-definition digital picture, and given the very limited amount of HDTV broadcast there's no compelling reason we can see to buy a high-definition STB at the moment.

'HD ready' is a not very helpful term that you'll see in some stores. It's used to indicate that the TV can accept an HD signal. However, it doesn't mean the screen can display an HD image.

To be truly HD the screen should have a vertical resolution of 576 pixels or more. Only the **HITACHI** tested could claim to be HD (yet its picture quality rated second-lowest); all the rest are standard-definition.

WHAT TO BUY

PANASONIC TH-42PA50A	\$2999
LG 42PX4DV-AA	\$3199

The **PANASONIC** has the best picture and sound in the test. It has some minor drawbacks (see its profile, page 14), but they aren't serious.

The **LG** is the only TV in the test with a built-in digital tuner. It's a high-definition (HD) tuner, but the screen can't display a high-definition picture, so it's a bit of a waste. However, it's a solid performer and HD tuners also supply standard-definition signals, so it'll save you buying a separate digital set-top box.

What to look for

- For plasma and LCD TVs, resolution is described in terms of the number of pixels on the horizontal and vertical axes (such as 852 x 480). As a general rule, the more pixels the higher the price. However, picture quality isn't just a matter of lots of pixels — see *Translating the image*, far left, for more on this.
- Watch the TV in the shop, looking at a variety of TV stations and programs, not just DVDs. Most plasmas give a great picture using a DVD but may not come up to scratch with a weaker TV signal. You may also need to adjust the picture controls (colour, contrast, brightness and sharpness) to get a good image. Be wary if you have to set a control to maximum to get the best picture — you mightn't be able to adjust it as the TV gets older.
- When you're checking out TVs in the shop, try to watch a talking head, such as a news presenter, to check if the skin tones are natural and how well fine details are reproduced, such as the texture of the presenter's hair.
- Look at all areas of the screen, not just the centre, making certain the image isn't dull, blurred or distorted in the centre or the corners.
- Colours shouldn't appear to be in bands when there's a transition from dark to light areas. In the worst cases colours may appear to vibrate, particularly in darker areas.
- When checking the sound, listen for clear, high notes that don't sound tinny or harsh. Mid-tones should be full-bodied and voices should be clear. Bass should be more than just a booming sound, and it shouldn't distort.
- Check where the speakers are on the set, as speakers at the sides (as on the **LG** and **PHILIPS**

on test) can produce a muffled sound if the TV is put in a cabinet. The **HITACHI**, **PANASONIC** and **SAMSUNG** have speakers under the screen and the **CELESTIAL**, **NEC** and **SANYO** speakers are detachable.

- Follow the usual rules for a good remote: frequently used buttons that are easy to find and use and preferably a different size or shape so you can find them when viewing in the dark.
- Check the onscreen menu instructions for ease of use and have a look at the instruction manual to make sure you can follow it.
- Ask about buying a wall mount if you want to have your TV on the wall — a space-saving option, but you'll need to follow manufacturer recommendations as plasma TVs can be heavy and some types of wall aren't sufficiently strong to support them over time.
- Image retention is where a picture remains as a 'ghost' image on the screen. It usually takes some time to occur and only happens with static images, but plasma TVs are prone to it. The good news is most of these images will disappear quite quickly with normal use, and all TVs in this test other than the **PANASONIC**, **PHILIPS** and **SANYO** have at least one method of minimising it.

It's likely that the potential for the problem will diminish as the screen ages because the pixels lose some of their brightness. Keeping the contrast level well below maximum when the screen is new will help minimise the problem.

FEATURES THEY (ALMOST) ALL HAVE

- NTSC-compatible video inputs (useful if you want to watch DVDs made in the USA).

- Controls for aspect ratio (screen width-to-height ratio).
- Analogue TV tuner. The **LG** also has a high-definition digital TV tuner (but see *What to buy*, above, for why this isn't quite as great as it sounds).
- Picture-in-picture (except the **CELESTIAL** and **NEC**). Most can only display the current broadcast channel and a separate input such as a DVD in this mode. Only those with more than one tuner can show two broadcast channels at the same time — see the table, page 14.
- Freeze-frame (except the **HITACHI** and **PHILIPS**), though of course if you do this to a TV program you'll miss out on the action until you unfreeze.
- Stereo sound.
- Sound-widening effect (except the **SANYO**).
- For TV channels: automatic and manual channel tuning; skip an unused channel (except the **HITACHI**); relocate a channel or rename it (except the **PANASONIC**); jump to the previous channel; show channel number onscreen.
- Auto standby if no broadcast is received for a few minutes (except the **PANASONIC**).
- Child lock.
- Off timer (all) and on timer (except the **HITACHI** and **PANASONIC**).
- Teletext and closed captions. The latter are subtitles with indications for sound effects, and colour-coding to make it easier to tell who's speaking. (The **CELESTIAL** doesn't have either, and the **SAMSUNG** only has teletext.)
- Can be connected to a computer to act as a monitor (except the **PANASONIC**).

PERFORMANCE

FEATURES

Brand / model (in rank order)	1 Overall score (%)	2 Picture quality score (%)	3 Sound quality score (%)	4 Ease of use score (%)	5 Standby energy score (%)	6 Analogue / digital tuner	7 Teletext and closed captions	8 Image retention reduction	9 Null bars	10 Eff. AV inp
PANASONIC TH-42PA50A	80	84	82	59	100	1/-			✓	3
LG 42PX4DV-AA	76	79	71	70	80	1/1	✓	✓	✓	4
SAMSUNG PS-42D5S	70	72	68	64	80	1/-	(B)	✓	✓	3
NEC PXT-42S115	68	72	68	63	60	1/-	✓	✓	✓	4
PHILIPS 42PF7320/79 (A)	68	76	56	56	80	1/-	✓			4
SANYO PDP-42XS1	68	72	65	55	80	2/-	✓			4 (C)
CELESTIAL PT4206	64	67	59	56	70	1/-		✓		2
HITACHI 42PD6000TA (A)	62	68	53	47	80	1/-	✓	✓	✓	3

Profiles

The models in the *What to buy* list are profiled in rank order.

PANASONIC TH-42PA50A

Price: \$2999

GOOD POINTS

- Very good picture and sound quality.
- The commonly used keys on the remote control are adequately sized.

BAD POINTS

- Some tuning functions lack clear instructions.
- The base is detached when you buy and you have to assemble it all together.
- No image retention reduction (see *What to look for*, page 13).
- No channel relocate or rename.
- No automatic standby if no broadcast received for a few minutes.
- Can't be used as a PC monitor.



Panasonic



LG

LG 42PX4DV-AA

Price: \$3199

GOOD POINTS

- Good picture and sound quality.
- The easiest to use.
- The commonly used keys on the remote control are adequately sized.
- HD digital tuner built-in as well as an analogue tuner, so it doesn't need a set-top box to display digital broadcasts.
- Composite video and S-video input sockets accessible from the front and independent of the rear, which are useful for connecting other video sources such as a video camera.
- Digital audio input and output sockets, which are useful if you want to connect other digital devices.
- HDMI socket (see *Video connections*, right).
- Has several ways of reducing or preventing image retention damage to the screen.

to the screen.

BAD POINTS

- While the digital tuner is high-definition, the screen can only produce a standard-definition display.
- The remote can also control a DVD, but its operation can be confusing.

WHAT ABOUT THE REST?

The PANASONIC and LG are slightly ahead of the pack, but you'd probably be happy with the SAMSUNG, NEC, PHILIPS and SANYO, especially if you found them at a good price.

All except the CELESTIAL and HITACHI have a good picture score — any of them is likely to be an impressive addition to your room. The CELESTIAL and HITACHI have a greenish tinge and a tendency to unevenness, with a lack of detail in some

dark scenes. The reds on the CELESTIAL appear paler than on the other TVs.

Sound quality is generally OK for most of the sets, but our listening assessment found that the HITACHI bass lacks impact and its other tones lack detail.

The HITACHI also gets the lowest ease of use score because its instructions are poor, some buttons on the remote control are small and tuning is complicated.

	SPECIFICATIONS					
11 HDMI / DVI input	Claimed resolution (pixels, W x H)	Dimensions (cm, H x W x D)*	Warranty (years)	Origin	Manufacturer / distributor	Price (\$)**
	852 x 480	77 x 107 x 32	1	Japan	Panasonic	2999
✓ / -	852 x 480	71 x 126 x 29	1	Korea	LG	3199
	852 x 480	77 x 106 x 34	2	Korea	Samsung	2799
- / ✓	852 x 480	72 x 124 x 32	1	Korea	NEC	3299
✓ / -	852 x 480	72 x 124 x 28	3	Belgium	Philips	3449
✓ / -	852 x 480	74 x 125 x 31	1	China	Sanyo	2499
- / ✓	852 x 480	70 x 125 x 36	1	China	Changhong Electric	2499
✓ / -	1024 x 1024	78 x 104 x 33	1	China	Hitachi	3499

Video connections

With all the different gadgets you can connect to your TV these days (DVD player/recorder, cable TV, PlayStation, video camera and so on), it's worth checking before buying how many devices you can hook up to your screen at the same time (see the table for model details). Here's a guide to the different kinds of connections available and what they're used for (note that, apart from SCART and HDMI, they all require separate audio connections):

- **Composite:** Most modern TVs have composite video input — the usual system for connecting VCRs, video cameras, games consoles and so on. The brightness and colour signals are combined into the single video signal.
- **S-video:** Identifiable by a small, round, four-pin plug, S-video offers better picture quality than composite because the brightness and colour signals are kept separate.
- **Component:** Separates the picture even further into brightness and colour signals, providing even better quality. Three video cables are required.
- **DVI (digital video interface)** is a connector for video that can carry digital video signals to a screen that can display them. There's also a DVI that carries analogue signals, but none of these TVs will support it.
- **HDMI (high-definition multimedia interface)** is an all-digital connection for both video and sound in one cable. HDMI connections can accept DVI input, if you have a special cable, but you have to connect sound separately.
- **SCART** (syndicat des constructeurs d'appareils radiorécepteurs et téléviseurs) is also known as a Euroconnector. This is a 21-pin connector for analogue video and sound.

DEAD PIXELS

Plasma TVs are made up of hundreds of thousands of pixels. If one of them gets stuck in one particular form (say as a particular colour) it's said to be dead. (We didn't find one in any of the tested sets.) One dead pixel won't be visible from a normal viewing distance, but a clump of them might.

Check the company's policy about this before you buy and inspect the screen as soon as you can to make sure it's OK. Even with a policy that said otherwise, you could argue that the set is not of merchantable quality (under the Trade Practices Act) if the failed pixels are visible from your normal viewing distance. In a case like this you'd take it back to the retailer to get a replacement.

* Rounded up to the next centimetre, with the base attached and all protruding parts included, cord and connecting cables excluded.

** Manufacturer's recommended retail price as of January 2006.

(A) To be discontinued, but you may still find it in shops.

(B) Teletext yes, closed captions no.

(C) Two of these are SCART connections.

1 Overall score

This is a combination of the following:

- Picture quality: 50%
- Sound quality: 20%
- Ease of use: 20%
- Standby energy consumption: 10%

Only the LG has a digital tuner; with the others you need to buy a set-top box to get the most out of your wide screen and digital TV's better picture and sound quality. See page 12 for more on this.

7 Teletext and closed captions

See *Features* (they almost all have, page 13, for an explanation).

8 Image retention reduction

See *What to look for*, page 13, for more on this. Reduction methods include things like reducing contrast, shifting a static image by a few pixels every few seconds and removal techniques such as displaying a white or moving pattern on the screen.

9 Null bars

When watching a 4:3 image on the screen, the normally black bars on the sides of the 16:9 screen can be given a colour or tone to help ensure even ageing of the pixels across the screen.

10 Effective audio/video (AV) inputs

The total number of devices that can be connected at the same time with sound. Most of the TVs can connect more picture inputs than sound, so if your set's hooked up to a separate sound system you'll have more options.

11 HDMI/DVI input

See *Video connections*, left, for an explanation.

2 Picture quality score

This is the combination of a:

- Visual evaluation of movies: 80%
- Visual and geometric evaluation of picture patterns: 20%

3 Sound quality score

This is a combination of a:

- General listening assessment: 80%
- Technical sound test, measuring frequency range, frequency response and smoothness: 20%

4 Ease of use score

This is made up of:

- Remote control: 50%
- Tuning and setting up channels: 20%
- Onscreen display user-friendliness: 20%
- Onboard controls: 10%

5 Standby energy score

We measured the power each machine uses in standby mode or equivalent (when the machine is turned off by the remote control but is still connected to the power). The higher the score, the lower the energy consumption on standby.

6 Analogue / digital tuner

The number of tuners included. Only those with more than one tuner are capable of displaying picture-in-picture from two different broadcast channels (see *What to look for*, page 13, for more).

High-interest risks

Have you been tempted by adverts promising 'safe and secure' investments returning interest at fixed rates that are considerably higher than conservative investments like government bonds and bank deposits? According to the Feb/Mar 2006 edition of *CHOICE Money & Rights*, while most of these 'high-yield' investments return interest and capital on time, some debentures, notes and mortgage funds may not be as safe and secure as they appear.

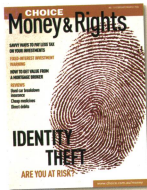
The Australian Securities and Investments Commission has cracked down on several high-yield fixed-interest companies' advertising and disclosure standards, and investors are being alerted to the potential risks of investing in the high-yield sector.

Money & Rights thinks many high-yield fixed-interest investments are inappropriate for investors looking for a genuinely safe and secure income in retirement. Some companies in this sector aren't a low-risk proposition: investors looking for a safe income can end up in a speculative investment — exactly what they don't want.

It's arguable that for many of the high-yield investments on offer, an 8–10% return (just 2–4% above top bank deposit rates) doesn't adequately compensate investors for the extra risks they're taking. Some of these potential risks include:

- **Related-party lending:** Some finance companies have lent 90–100% of the money they raise from the public to related parties, including affiliated property development companies. Your money may be used to fund relatively risky property developments and projects.
- **Valuations:** The value of the property used as security for your investment could be based on its value 'as if complete', when construction hasn't yet finished.
- **Loans in default:** If a borrower defaults on repayments to a mortgage fund, for example, there's a risk that investors won't receive some of their capital and interest. At the time of writing, about 50% of one particular mortgage fund's loans are in default.

For more information on what to watch for when considering investments in high-yield debentures, notes and mortgage funds, and the safer options for a retirement income stream, subscribe to *CHOICE Money & Rights* (see below).



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CAR INSPECTIONS SAVE MONEY

A recent report by NRMA Motoring and Services found that 42% of all used cars sold privately in NSW could have serious mechanical faults, and that 90% in the survey had at least one general fault.

The report is based on 840 vehicle inspections over the last four years. The NRMA says almost half the vehicles analysed were found to have faults such as extremely worn tyres, lights that didn't work, defective steering and suspension, brake defects and airbag warning light malfunctions. The most common problems found in privately sold used cars in 2004/2005 were:

- Tyres and wheels (65%).
- Engine noises (48%).
- Engine oil leaks (56%).
- Brakes (41%).
- Electrical faults (54%).

Not surprisingly, the NRMA, which conducts vehicle inspections for \$239 (non-members) and \$199 (members), recommends getting an inspection before buying a used car through private sale. It claims that in the year to June 2005, an average of \$954 worth of faults was identified by its inspectors before private purchases were made. Motoring groups in other states conduct similar inspections.



In the 12 months to June 2005 nearly 900 of the complaints about privacy received by the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman (TIO) concerned telemarketing.

If you're annoyed at being interrupted at home by a telemarketing call, you can register your name on the Australian Direct Marketing Association's (ADMA) 'Do not contact' register. It has 500 member organisations, including banks, insurance companies and charities. You can request not to receive mail, email, phone and SMS communications.

Fill in the online form at www.adma.com.au or send your opt-out request to ADMA Do Not Contact Service, Reply Paid 4054, Sydney 2001.

However, registering for the service won't stop you getting household flyers from local retailers and telephone calls from market research firms, real estate agents and local businesses, or from businesses that don't belong to ADMA.

Last year the Minister for Communications, Senator Helen Connan, released a discussion paper about options for a national legislated 'do not call' register. Under one proposal companies would face penalties if they phoned someone who'd listed their phone number on the register.

Trying to work out which painkiller to buy can be a pain in the neck.

We help you choose.

Pill the pain



When you've got a splitting headache, your child is hot with fever or your ankle is throbbing with pain from a sprain, it's good to know that relief is at hand in the form of a simple painkiller. But with so many different products on the shelves, how do you know which one to use?

This article takes a look at the different types of over-the-counter (OTC) painkillers you can buy from supermarkets and pharmacies and explains how they work, what they're good for and who can take them. We also highlight the best-value painkillers from our review of over 130 products.

HOW PAINKILLERS WORK

When tissues are damaged through injury or disease, chemicals called prostaglandins are produced at the site. These hormone-like substances trigger pain signals to the brain and cause inflammation.

Painkillers reduce pain in different ways, depending on the class they belong to — some target the site of pain while others reduce the sensation of pain.

Broadly speaking painkillers fall into three classes: paracetamol, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), which include aspirin and ibuprofen, and opioids or narcotics, including codeine.

Painkillers also differ in their side effects, and for this reason not all drugs will suit all people — particularly if you're very young, an older person or have any of various health complaints. For

information about who should and shouldn't take them and what conditions they're suitable for, see *Over-the-counter painkillers*, page 18.

Paracetamol

Paracetamol is thought to work by blocking pain messages to the brain. It has few side effects, so is a popular choice of painkiller for adults and children alike. It will relieve mild pain and fever, but because it primarily acts on the central nervous system, it won't reduce inflammation.

Aspirin, ibuprofen, naproxen, diclofenac and mefenamic acid

The class of drugs known as NSAIDs acts by stopping or reducing the production of prostaglandins at the site of pain or inflammation. For this reason they'll both relieve pain and help reduce the swelling associated with complaints like sprains, strains and arthritis.

■ Aspirin is the original NSAID and has been used as a medicine for hundreds of years. In addition to its painkilling ability it helps prevent blood clots from forming, and it's used in low doses (on medical advice) by people at risk of heart attacks or clot-related strokes. However, it can irritate the stomach lining and cause indigestion, among other side effects.

■ The newer NSAIDs, ibuprofen and diclofenac in particular, are more gentle on the stomach but can still cause stomach upsets, so they're best taken with food.

■ Once you know which active ingredient you want, shop around for the cheapest product — we saved almost 50% on a shopping basket of painkillers by buying the generic versions instead of the well-known brands.

■ Not all painkillers are suitable for everyone, so make sure you know which ones you should or shouldn't take and be aware of potential side effects. If you have any concerns, speak to your doctor or pharmacist.

These NSAIDs received some bad press last year, with the media reporting on research linking them to heart attacks.

However, researchers in the observational study that found the OTC NSAIDs diclofenac and ibuprofen were associated with a higher risk of heart attack hadn't taken other factors into account. For example, people may have been prescribed the painkillers in the first place to treat conditions that are themselves risk factors for heart attacks. Post-publication it received some criticism from health professionals, and the resulting advice was that people shouldn't panic and stop taking these medications, but should instead discuss any concerns with their doctor.

A study in the same month reported severe side effects in kids who had taken them (see *Children's painkillers*, page 21, for more on this).

Following the publication of these two studies, the Pharmacy Guild of Australia renewed its calls for the sale of ibuprofen to be restricted to pharmacies,

where it claims the necessary advice and warnings will be given to consumers. However, based on CHOICE's shadow shops of pharmacies over the years, you're not guaranteed good, or indeed any, advice when you buy products from a pharmacy. It's therefore vital that before taking a painkiller you check that it's suitable for you — the packaging gives details of who shouldn't use it, and also see our table below — and take it as directed.

Codeine

Codeine belongs to the addictive group of drugs called opioids (derived from opium) and is only available OTC in low doses and combined with paracetamol, aspirin or ibuprofen. It works by dulling or possibly altering the brain's responses to the pain message.

Codeine can make you drowsy and lose concentration, so it's best to avoid alcohol and be careful about driving or using machinery while taking it.

OVER-THE-COUNTER PAINKILLERS

FOR THE RELIEF OF PAIN AND DISCOMFORT ASSOCIATED WITH ...

Active ingredient	Some common brands	Dose range for adults (mg, and maximum daily dose)*	Headaches, general aches	Fever	Toothache / dental pain	Osteoarthritis	Inflammation**	Pe
Paracetamol	ARTHRITIS AUSTRALIA, CHEMISTS' OWN, DYMADON, HERRON, NYAL, PANADOL, PANAMAX, PARALGIN, TYLENOL	500–1000 (4000)	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Aspirin	ALKA-SELTZER, ASPRO, BAYER, DISPRIN, SOLPRIN, VINCENT'S	300–600 (3600)	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Ibuprofen	ACTIPROFEN, ADVIL, CHEMISTS' OWN, HERRON, HEXAL, NUROFEN, PANAFEN, PROVEN, RAFEN 200, SOUL PATTINSON, TRI-PROFEN	200–400 (1600)	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Diclofenac	VOLTAREN	25–50 (150)	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Mefenamic acid	PONSTAN	500 (1500)	✓	✓			✓	✓
Naproxen	ALEVE, CHEMISTS' OWN, HEXAL, NAPROGESIC, NUROFEN	250–500 (1000)	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Codeine / paracetamol formulations	CHEMISTS' OWN, CODALGIN, CODAPANE, CODRAL, DYMADON, MERSYNDOL, PANADEINE, PANAMAX CO	As for paracetamol	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Codeine / aspirin formulations	ASPALGIN, CODIS, CODOX, DISPRIN FORTE, VEGANIN	As for aspirin	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Codeine / ibuprofen formulations	PANAFEN PLUS, NUROFEN PLUS	As for ibuprofen	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓

* As recommended by the TGA. Individual product information may vary.

** Inflammation associated with arthritis, strains and sprains.

(A) Over six months of age.

1 The cheapest

These are the products we found with the lowest price per dose. We calculated this from the pack price, based on the average of prices from at least three different stores. Where different pack sizes were available, we bought the one closest to 24. If larger packs (such as 48, 50 or 100) are available, the price may be even lower.

STRONGER AND LONGER

A number of aspirin-based painkillers are touted as extra-strong, and have words like 'max' and 'extra' in their names. Instead of a standard 300 mg aspirin, the 'extra-strength' tablets each contain 500 mg.

Essentially this means you can take one tablet instead of two, for a similar effect. If you find you need to take a two-tablet dose of regular aspirin to relieve your pain, taking the extra-strength version could save you money. For example, one **DISPRIN Max** tablet costs around 19 cents, compared with 25 cents for a two-tablet dose of **DISPRIN Original**.

Another variation is the long-lasting painkiller, such as **PANADOL Extend**. This can be helpful for conditions like osteoarthritis, where you might be taking painkillers regularly, but want to be able to take fewer doses in a day and still get continuous pain relief. The caplets each contain 665 mg paracetamol, a little more than the standard 500 mg, and they're formulated to release the paracetamol more slowly.

The product claims to give up to eight hours' pain relief — useful if pain is waking you up at night.

CHOOSING WHAT TO BUY

Choose a painkiller without giving yourself a headache by following these three simple steps:

- Decide which **active ingredient(s)** you'd like, according to the kind of pain it is, your age and general state of health (use the information in the table below as a guide).
- If you can swallow them easily, go for ordinary **tablets** — they're usually cheaper than capsule-shaped tablets ('caplets'/'tabsules'), capsules or gel-coated ('capseals'/'gelcaps') versions.
- Choose the **cheapest brand** you can find, which for paracetamol, aspirin and ibuprofen is likely to be a supermarket's own brand. So-called generic products like these have the same amount of active ingredient and work just as well as the equivalent big-name brands — so forget brand loyalty and buy on price.

Suitable for children?

Possible adverse effects

Not suitable for

1 The cheapest (average pack price / tablets in pack)

✓

Overdose can cause liver damage and death.

People with severe liver or kidney disease.

Tablets

• NO FRILLS (\$0.70 / 24, Franklins), HOME BRAND (\$0.73 / 24, Woolworths), COLES (\$0.79 / 24) at around 6 cents per two-tablet dose.

Other forms

• COLES (\$0.95 / 24), TYLENOL (\$4.45 / 100), DYMADON (\$1.49 / 24), HOME BRAND (\$1.76 / 24), NYAL (\$2.05 / 24) all have caplets or capsules for under 20 cents per two-tablet dose.
• PANADOL Soluble (\$3.04 / 20) costs around 30 cents per two-tablet dose.

Tablets

• 300 mg: NO FRILLS (\$0.70 / 24), COLES (\$0.92 / 24), HOME BRAND (\$0.92 / 24), BI-LO (\$0.94 / 24) at about 8 cents per two-tablet dose.
• 500 mg: BAYER (\$2.55 / 16) at about 16 cents per tablet.

Soluble tablets

• 300 mg: SOLPRIN (\$3.85 / 96) at about 8 cents per two-tablet dose.
• 500 mg: DISPRIN Max (\$3.11 / 16) at 19 cents per tablet, ASPRO CLEAR Extra Strength (\$3.46 / 16) at 22 cents per tablet.

Tablets

• RAFEN 200 (\$5.22 / 50) at 21 cents, BI-LO (\$2.83 / 24) at 24 cents per two-tablet dose.

Caplets

• HOME BRAND (\$3.49 / 24) at around 29 cents per two-tablet dose.

The only product we found was VOLTAREN Rapid 25 (about \$9.99 / 20): a two-tablet dose costs roughly \$1.

✓ (A)

Rare nausea, vomiting, indigestion. Interactions with other drugs.

As for aspirin, but gentler on the stomach. Not suitable for children under six months.

Nausea, vomiting, indigestion. Dizziness, drowsiness. Ringing in the ears. Interactions with other drugs.

As for aspirin, but gentler on the stomach.

Ditto

Ditto

Ditto

Ditto

From codeine: nausea, constipation, drowsiness. Abuse potential (addiction among long-term users).

From codeine: People with liver or lung disease, enlarged prostate, underactive thyroid; elderly people (who are more vulnerable to side effects).

Ditto

Ditto

Ditto

Ditto

The only product we found was NONSTAN (about \$8.95 / 20) at around 90 cents per two-tablet dose.

SOUL PATTINSON Naproxen Pain Relief Anti-inflammatory (\$8.75 / 30) at 53 cents per two-tablet dose.

Codeine plus paracetamol (500 mg): PANAMAX Co (\$6.93 / 50), AMCAL (\$4.28 / 24) tablets, CHEMISTS' OWN Pain Tablets (\$4.11 / 24) all cost less than 40 cents per two-tablet dose. Of these, CHEMISTS' OWN contains the most codeine phosphate per tablet (10 mg).

Codeine plus aspirin (500 mg): CODIS with 8 mg codeine phosphate (\$5.92 / 24), DISPRIN Forte with 9.5 mg codeine phosphate (\$6.34 / 24) at about 30–32 cents per soluble tablet.

Codeine plus ibuprofen (200 mg): PANAFEN Plus caplets (\$6.13 / 24) are the cheapest at 51 cents per two-tablet dose. NUROFEN Plus tablets (\$7.81 / 24) cost about 65 cents per two-tablet dose. Both contain 12.8 mg codeine phosphate per tablet.

Best Buys

Do you instinctively reach for **NUROFEN** or **PANADOL** when you have a headache? If so, you might want to think again. We compared the cost of a basket of supermarket-brand and pharmacy-brand ('generic') painkillers with the equivalent in leading brands, and found that the generics basket was almost \$8 cheaper — almost 50% savings. Per pack, you're looking at savings from \$1.20 to \$2.30. For the comparison we chose the cheapest tablet versions of leading brands closest in strength and pack size to the cheapest nationally available generic tablets.

For equivalent products, the active ingredient is the same and in the same amount, and your headache should clear up just as quickly. What you're essentially getting for the extra money is smart packaging, a well-known brand and perhaps a more palatable tablet coating. It's well worth bearing this in mind the next time you need to restock your medicine cabinet.

Generics Co-Op	Price (\$)	Branded Pharmacy Ltd	Price (\$)
COLES Aspirin (300 mg), 24 tablets	0.92	ASPRO (320 mg), 20 tablets	3.23
BI-LO Ibuprofen (200 mg), 24 tablets	2.83	NUROFEN (200 mg), 24 tablets	4.90
HOME BRAND Paracetamol (500 mg), 24 tablets	0.73	PANADOL (500 mg), 24 tablets	3.03
AMCAL Strong Pain Relief (8 mg codeine phosphate, 500 mg paracetamol), 24 tablets	4.28	PANADEINE (8 mg codeine phosphate, 500 mg paracetamol), 24 tablets	5.50
Total	8.76		16.66
SAVINGS	7.90		

The prices for each are an average of what we saw in supermarkets and pharmacies in December 2005 and January 2006. They're intended as a guide only.

See The cheapest, page 18, for an explanation of how we found the Best Buys.

Best Buys (nationally available).



'Natural' painkillers

If you're interested in an alternative way to relieve pain, there are some 'natural' painkillers on the market, including **NATURE'S WAY Strong Pain** tablets and **BRAUER Pain & Fever Relief** drops, which claim to be drug-free — or at least free from synthetic drugs.

Some (including the **BRAUER**) are homeopathic remedies — essentially, highly diluted extracts of natural substances that in healthy people would produce symptoms similar to those of the condition you're trying to treat (such as a cold or flu). The intended effect is to stimulate the body's natural healing process.

Other products (like the **NATURE'S WAY**) contain a range of herbal extracts, many of which have been used for years in traditional medicine to relieve pain, although evidence for their effectiveness is often only anecdotal. But certainly one herbal ingredient, willow bark, has been clinically proven as an effective pain reliever. Its active constituent, salicin, is closely related to aspirin.

But like any drug — natural or otherwise — there are potential adverse effects and interactions with other medications, so talk to a doctor or pharmacist before taking them.



Children's painkillers

The choice in OTC painkillers for children is restricted to ibuprofen or paracetamol, although once you include the huge array of different strengths and product forms, such as baby drops, elixirs, suspensions, chewable tablets and suppositories, there are more than enough products to choose from — we saw at least 28.

While paracetamol is still the drug of choice for reducing pain and fever — partly, if not mainly, because of its proven track record over decades — the use of ibuprofen for children has rapidly escalated over the last five years. However, its popularity may have suffered a blow recently when Australian researchers reported that more children suffered adverse side effects from ibuprofen than from paracetamol.

Overall, though, the number of children who had side effects was relatively low (24 cases over a five-year period), and some of the side effects seen were due to overdosing. The risk of adverse side effects from OTC painkillers is generally very low if they're used correctly.

So when giving painkillers to babies and children, follow these tips to be safe:

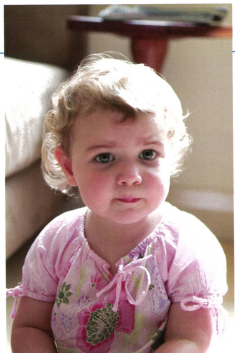
- Use the right product, strength and dose for the child's age and weight (recommended doses, according to the child's age and weight, are given on the product packaging).
- Don't keep giving the painkiller for more than 48 hours unless specifically advised to by a doctor.
- Use the measure provided — or if there isn't one, a metric medicine measure — to pour the dose.
- Make sure the bottle cap is on securely after use, and keep it in a safe place out of the reach of children.



Teething trials

Keira has been in a lot of pain from teething, and Kim finds that a dose of paracetamol every four hours as recommended doesn't seem to be enough. She's considered alternating the paracetamol with ibuprofen to see if this helps, but is reluctant to mix the drugs without expert advice.

So we asked an expert about Kim's dilemma, and were told that it's not advisable to co-use different drugs, as this might increase the risk of side effects. With children, give regular doses of paracetamol or ibuprofen as recommended to allow the drug time to work, but if after a whole day it's still not working, see your doctor.



Paracetamol Best Buys

Drops

- DYMADON Paracetamol Pain & Fever Relief for Babies (1 month–2 years), \$5.25 / 60 mL (26 cents per dose)

Elixir / suspension

- CHEMMART Chemadol Colourfree Suspension (1–5 years), \$8.95 / 200 mL (27 cents per dose)
- SOUL PATTINSON Colour Free Children's Paracetamol Suspension (1–5 years), \$4.95 / 100 mL (30 cents per dose)
- CHEMISTS' OWN Children's Paracetamol Suspension (1–5 years), \$5.25 / 100 mL (32 cents per dose)

Soluble tablets

- PANADOL 7+ Years Soluble, \$3.32 / 12 (55 cents per dose)

Chewable tablets

- CHILDREN'S TYLENOL (2–12 years), \$6.48 / 24 (80 cents per dose)

Elixir / suspension

- CHEMMART Chemadol Colourfree Suspension (5–12 years), \$11.95 / 200 mL bottle (48 cents per dose)
- CHEMISTS' OWN Children's Paracetamol Suspension (5–12 years), \$6.95 / 100 mL (56 cents per dose)
- SOUL PATTINSON Colour Free Children's Paracetamol Suspension Concentrated (5–12 years), \$7.14 / 100 mL (57 cents per dose)

Babies (costs in brackets based on a dose for a one-year-old)

Children (costs in brackets based on a dose for an eight-year-old)

Ibuprofen Best Buys

Suspension

- CHEMISTS' OWN Ibuprofen Pain & Fever Suspension (6 months–12 years), \$8.02 / 100 mL (40 cents per dose)

Drops

- NUROFEN for Children Pain & Fever Relief (from 6 months), \$10.39 / 100 mL (52 cents per dose)

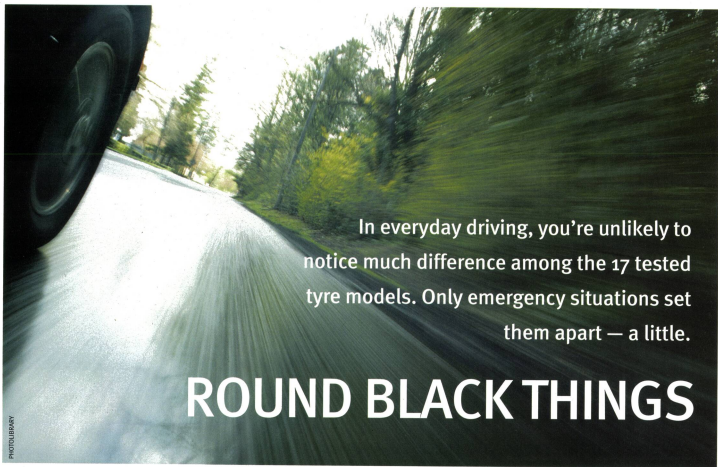
Suspension

- CHEMISTS' OWN Ibuprofen Pain & Fever Suspension (6 months–12 years), \$8.02 / 100 mL (80 cents per dose)

Drops

- NUROFEN for Children Pain & Fever Relief (from 6 months), \$10.39 / 100 mL (\$1.04 per dose)

See The Cheapest, page 18, for an explanation of how we found the Best Buys.



In everyday driving, you're unlikely to notice much difference among the 17 tested tyre models. Only emergency situations set them apart — a little.

ROUND BLACK THINGS

IN A NUTSHELL

■ **Only cornering** in the wet and braking from a high speed in the wet showed noticeable differences among the 17 tested models.

■ **A tyre's price** doesn't indicate how well it performs.

■ **CHOICE can't** test tyre durability. But some models have a comparative tread wear rating that gives some indication of which tyre you can expect to last longer — see *How to read a tyre*, page 24.

For almost two weeks, our tyre testing team put their bodies on the line for you during high-speed cornering and emergency braking tests — and about 500 tyre changes.

We tested 17 models of 205/65R15 tyres with an H speed rating, suitable for a number of large family sedans (see *How to read a tyre*, page 24, for what the figures mean).

If you're shopping for a new set of tyres, you don't have to stick with the model originally fitted to your car by the manufacturer. Just make sure you pick a tyre that meets your car's requirements for size and speed rating (check the owner's manual for details).

WHAT WE TEST

Each tyre design varies in its tread pattern and rubber mix and is a compromise between a number of requirements, such as grip and durability.

A soft tyre provides better grip but also leaves more rubber on the road, and won't last as long as a harder model. Racing tyres are an extreme example: they're very soft and almost glue the car to the track, but usually only last for (part of) one race.

Our cornering and braking tests (see notes 2 and 3, page 25, for details) assess the tyres' grip, but not their durability. Tyre wear is difficult and

expensive to test properly — for example, several European consumer organisations and motoring clubs carry out a joint test, part of which is a convoy drive over 10,000 kilometres, using identical cars. Unfortunately we can't join their test, because most European tyres are different from Australian ones. And we can't afford to run a similar test on our own.

However, some tyres have a tread wear rating (see page 24) that can give you some idea of how long a tyre should last compared with others used in the same conditions.

CORNERING

We tested the tyres at three different speeds in dry and wet conditions:

■ In the dry, all the models easily mastered our test corner at 75 km/h, but none managed to hold the test car in its lane at 85 km/h. At 80 km/h, the **SIAMTYRE** (it scored 60%) didn't quite match the other models (80–100%).

■ In the wet, none of the tested models had problems at 65 km/h, and all scored between 80% and 100% at 70 km/h. But the **CONTINENTAL** was the only model to keep the test car in the lane at 75 km/h.

Our tests show that 5 km/h can make the difference between your car holding a corner quite comfortably and going out of control.

Tyre maintenance

- Tyre pressure is measured in kilopascals (kPa) or pounds per square inch (psi).
- Keep your tyres inflated to the pressure recommended by the car manufacturer — usually shown on a sticker on the inside of the driver's door frame, in the glovebox or on the petrol tank flap.
- The car manufacturer's recommendations refer to the pressure when the tyre's cold, not after you've been driving for some time.
- When driving with a heavy load, inflate your tyres to a higher pressure — check the sticker.
- Driving with under-inflated tyres uses more petrol, adversely affects the car's handling, increases tyre wear and may lead to tyre damage.
- Check the pressure regularly — for example, make it a habit each time you fill up with petrol.
- And don't forget to check the spare's air

pressure when you do the other tyres.

- Every so often, do a visual check for objects embedded in the tread, such as stones or glass.
- Check for uneven wear, which could indicate a problem with the car's steering or suspension.
- Run your hands over the tread and sidewalls to identify any bubbles, cuts or cracks.
- Keep an eye on the tyres' tread wear indicators, which show the minimum legal tread of 1.6 mm. The indicators are small bars spaced across the grooves of the tyre's tread pattern. Replace your tyres when the tread level reaches the indicators — at the latest.
- Rotate the tyres regularly — for example, at every service.
- When putting on new tyres, have them balanced and a wheel alignment done.

THANK YOU

We'd like to thank:

- **Holden** for providing the test car.
- **Deighton Motors** in Warwick, Queensland, for valuable support throughout the project.
- **Morgan Park Raceway** in Warwick for their efforts to ensure a smooth test.

BRAKING

We measured the following average stopping distances:

- From 50 km/h, they ranged from about 7.5 m (DUNLOP, GOODYEAR) to 9.5 m (CONTINENTAL, YOKOHAMA) in dry conditions, and about 10 m (FIRESTONE, GOODYEAR, HANKOOK, KELLY, PIRELLI) to 12 m (CONTINENTAL) in the wet.
- From 80 km/h, from about 24 m (FIRESTONE, SIAMTYRE, TOYO) to 26.5 m (YOKOHAMA) in the dry and about 28.5 (MICHELIN) to 34 m (SAVA) in the wet.

In an emergency situation, a few metres can of course mean the difference between stopping in time and having a crash. However, our results are best-case. In real life, other factors have an effect as well:

- **ABS:** Our results were certainly helped by the anti-lock braking system fitted to our test car. In an emergency situation like that simulated by our tests, you just slam on the brakes and the electronics ensure the car stops as quickly as possible without locking the tyres.

When driving a car without ABS, you have to adjust the force applied to the brake pedal to stop the tyres from locking up. This can be tricky, and it'd be much harder to achieve stopping distances as good as ours.

- **Reaction time:** Our test driver knew he was going to have to brake — in an emergency, you won't. Half a second's reaction time at 50 km/h means an additional 7 m stopping distance; at 80 km/h it's an additional 11 m.

Tricky tyres

- Some tyres are **one-directional** (or **asymmetrical**), which means they're designed to be fitted to the car so their tread pattern faces a particular way (usually marked with an arrow on the sidewall). Fitting them on the wrong side may affect the car's handling and reduce the tyre's life.

They're usually premium tyres. If you use one and don't have a conventional tyre as a spare, be aware that a one-directional spare only fits one side of the car. If you have to use it on the wrong side, drive carefully and only until you can replace the damaged tyre.

Don't confuse one-directional tyres with models designed to be fitted to the rim so that a particular side (marked on the tyre's sidewall) faces outwards. With these, the spare can replace any of the other tyres.

- Some car models have an emergency space-saver (narrower) spare instead of a full-size one. If you have to use it, follow the instructions in your user manual. There's likely to be a speed limitation, and you're only supposed to drive on it for a short distance to get you home or to the nearest tyre fitter. Use over longer distances or at higher speeds may damage your car.



How to read a tyre

Each tyre has standard markings that allow you to pick the right tyre for your car. It's a confusing mix of letters and numbers, and of measurements in mm and inches.

Here's what it all means, using the code for the tested size P205/65R15 94H and 95H:

- P — stands for passenger tyre.
- 205 — this is the maximum width of the tread area (in mm) when the tyre is inflated and not under load.
- 65 — this is a percentage describing the tyre's profile or aspect ratio. It's the ratio between the tyre's height from the wheel rim to the top of the tyre and its width — in this case 65%.
- R — stands for radial, which is the most common construction method for passenger car tyres.
- 15 — this refers to the diameter (in inches) of the rim the tyre should be fitted to.
- 95 is the load rating index and tells you the maximum weight one tyre can carry (in this case it means 690 kg). Other examples: 84 (500 kg), 86 (530 kg), 89 (580 kg), 92 (630 kg), 94 (670 kg).
- H — this is the speed rating index and tells you the maximum speed the tyre can travel at (in this case 210 km/h). Other examples: S (180 km/h), T (190km/h), V (240 km/h), W (270 km/h).

TREAD WEAR RATING

Tyre models that are marketed in the US have to have a **tread wear rating** as part of the Uniform Tyre Quality Grading System (UTQG) operated by the US government's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. About half the tested models have this rating.

Under the system, a tyre's tread wear is measured under controlled conditions involving an 11,500 km drive on a specified test course, and compared to a 'standard' tyre with a rating of 100.

A rating of 200 indicates that the tested tyre should last twice as long as the standard model under the same conditions. So the higher the number, the longer you can expect a tyre to last.

However, the rating is comparative only. Real-life wear of a tyre depends on a number of aspects, such as the road surface, tyre pressure, wheel alignment and driving style.

Also part of the UTQG, and printed on the tyre sidewall next to the tread wear rating (see the photo below), are:

- A **traction** rating that grades the tyre's wet braking traction (AA, A, B or C, with AA being best).
- A **temperature** rating, which indicates a tyre's ability to dissipate heat (A, B, C, with A being best).



While our intrepid tester puts one of the tyres through its paces in the wet ...



... another team member takes a break from the pressures of the test.

Brand / model (in rank order)

CONTINENTAL Conti Premium Contact 2

GOODYEAR Ducaro GA

MICHELIN Energy XM1

DUNLOP LeMans LM600

FIRESTONE Firehawk TZ100

HANKOOK Optimo K406

PIRELLI P6

FULDA Sport

KELLY Ritmo HP

GT RADIAL Champiro 128

SONAR SA-603

TOYO Transas TEO

BRIDGESTONE RE92 (A)

SIAMTYRE Ultrax 624400

MARSHALL Power Racer-II 719

SAVA Intensa

YOKOHAMA S760

	PERFORMANCE			SPECIFICATIONS			
	1 Overall score (%)	2 Cornering score (%)	3 Braking score (%)	4 Tread wear rating	Origin	Manufacturer / distributor	Price (\$)*
CONTINENTAL Conti Premium Contact 2	78	80	75	280	Europe	Tyres4U	158
GOODYEAR Ducaro GA	78	73	85	ns	Australia	South Pacific Tyres	(B) 116
MICHELIN Energy XM1	77	72	85	320	Thailand	Michelin	128
DUNLOP LeMans LM600	76	70	85	ns	Australia	South Pacific Tyres	125
FIRESTONE Firehawk TZ100	76	70	85	ns	NZ	Bridgestone	105
HANKOOK Optimo K406	76	70	85	360	Korea	Hankook	(B) 103
PIRELLI P6	76	70	85	260	Italy	Pirelli	136
FULDA Sport	74	70	80	ns	NZ	South Pacific Tyres	99
KELLY Ritmo HP	74	67	85	ns	Australia	South Pacific Tyres	90
GT RADIAL Champiro 128	72	70	75	460	China	Tyres 4U	110
SONAR SA-603	72	67	80	480	Taiwan	Kmart Auto	79
TOYO Transas TEO	72	67	80	ns	Japan	Toyo	(B) 122
BRIDGESTONE RE92 (A)	71	68	75	ns	Australia	Bridgestone	(B) 105
SIAMTYRE Ultrax 624400	71	65	80	280	Thailand	Michelin	89
MARSHALL Power Racer-II 719	70	67	75	340	Korea	Kumho	95
SAVA Intensa	68	67	70	ns	NZ	South Pacific Tyres	89
YOKOHAMA S760	68	67	70	ns	Philippines	Yokohama	109

WHAT TO BUY



Continental (\$158)



Goodyear (\$116)



Michelin (\$128)



Dunlop (\$125)



Firestone (\$105)



Hankook (\$103)



Pirelli (\$136)

PROFILES: GENE ROSS

We tested the tyres in fairly extreme situations you'd normally only encounter in emergencies. In everyday driving conditions, all the tested models are likely to perform OK, and the differences indicated by our scores may not be noticeable.

However, if you think emergency performance is what really counts, the all-round top performers are those pictured above. As you can see from the range of prices, paying more doesn't necessarily get you a better tyre.

* Recommended retail, based on manufacturer information in September and December 2005, unless stated otherwise. Tyre prices can vary widely, so shop around for the model you're interested in — you may be able to find it well below the recommended retail price.

ns Not stated. The tread wear rating is a requirement for the US market only.

(A) According to the manufacturer, this model will soon be replaced with the 592.

(B) No recommended retail price is provided. The price shown is based on a survey in Sydney in January 2006.

1 Overall score

This is a combination of cornering (60%) and braking (40%).

2 Cornering score

We assessed how well the tyres managed to keep the car on the path within the lane chosen by our test driver, at speeds of 75 km/h, 80 km/h and 85 km/h (dry conditions), and 65 km/h, 70 km/h and 75 km/h (wet conditions), using a right-hand corner with about 40 m radius.

3 Braking score

We measured the distance to a complete standstill in emergency braking tests from 50 km/h and 80 km/h, in both dry and wet conditions.

Note: We also carried out rolling noise measurements at the driver's left ear at 50 km/h and 80 km/h. At each speed, there was a difference of less than 2 dB between the models — you wouldn't be able to notice that difference.

4 Tread wear rating

See *How to read a tyre*, far left, for an explanation of this. Essentially, the higher the rating, the longer you can expect the tyre to last (compared with other tyres under the same conditions).

SUPERMARKET SWEEP



Coles and Woolworths have launched new 'private label' ranges. We check out the changes.

IN A NUTSHELL

■ Coles and Woolworths have launched new 'private label' (aka house brand) ranges, and the proportion of these lines on shelves is set to increase significantly over the next few years.

■ You'll probably find that with these changes will come some savings, but commentators predict that some of your favourite, smaller brands may also be swept from the shelves to make way for private label products.

If you shop at Coles or Woolworths, chances are you've already noticed their new brands.

In Woolworths, canned fruit, vegetables, fish and packaged cheese and nuts with smart silver labels denoting its new **SELECT** brand have appeared on shelves. And in Coles, the cheerful-looking **COLES SMART BUY** and the personalised **YOU'LL LOVE COLES** brands already have a significant presence in its toilet paper, shampoo, birdseed and dried pasta aisles.

Both supermarkets recently announced plans to increase the number of these 'private label' (house brand) lines in stores, and judging by the experience of retailers overseas, it's a smart move (see *Overseas supermarket scene*, page 28, for more). Private labels increase profits for the supermarkets. They also provide retailer identity — the consistent product labelling a constant reminder of where you buy your groceries. But for shoppers, supermarkets as we know them may never be quite the same again.

THE BRANDS

In 2004, private label had 12% (value) share of packaged groceries in Australia. But this is in the process of changing.

Coles has announced that it hopes to increase its private label market share to 30–40% by 2007. Its goal is to replace its current **SAVINGS**, **FARMLAND**,

COLES, **RELiance** and **PERSONA** brands with around 3000 lines under its new brands **COLES SMART BUY** (budget), **YOU'LL LOVE COLES** (mid-range) and **GEORGE J COLES** (the yet to be launched premium label). See *The brands explained*, page 29, for more detail.

Woolworths is retaining its budget **HOMe BRAND** label (along with its **WOOLWORTHS FRESH**, **ORGANICS** and **NAYTURA** labels), but it plans to introduce an additional 200 lines under its new premium brand, **WOOLWORTHS SELECT**, pitched as being of highest quality, equivalent to if not better than the current market leader. Its earlier private label brands, including **ARK**, **BOWMAN'S** and **MARKETTA**, launched as a direct response to the arrival of **ALDI** in Australia, are being phased out.

THE PRODUCTS

Until now, product categories with the highest private label share were mostly low-price, high-volume staples,



PROFILES: LITE MEGAN

such as sugar, birdseed, butter, vegetable oil (excluding olive), fresh milk, flour, paper napkins, cotton wool and chilled cream. With these fairly basic types of products, trust in the brand isn't a major consideration for shoppers (see *What consumers think*, below, for more).

But as we become more and more accepting of private label brands, we're likely to see more products in the health and beauty and specialist food and beverage categories, where branding is important to shoppers. **YOU'LL LOVE COLES** shampoos, conditioners and beauty soap are just some examples.



WHAT CONSUMERS THINK

A recent global consumer survey by AC Nielsen found that Australian acceptance of private label brands was the highest in the Asia Pacific region, with nearly four in five Australian consumers saying private label products were a good alternative to other brands. And 81% of Australian consumers (compared with 60% across the Asia Pacific region) agreed that the private label products they bought usually offered extremely good value for money. This is obviously very positive news for retailers.

As for the level of quality that private label products offer, generally Australian consumers are less concerned about staples like milk, sugar and flour. But we're more reluctant to trust the quality of products like ready meals, face cream or baby food, and may prefer a known and trusted brand. It's this trust and brand loyalty that supermarkets are hoping to gain as they continue to roll out their premium private labels.

PRIVATE LABEL POSITIVES

Retail experts and the Private Label Manufacturers' Association say private label lines benefit shoppers because they:

- **Are easy to identify.** Consistent branding and clearly differentiated tiers allow you to readily identify the varying quality and value levels so you can make an informed decision about what to buy.
- **Save you money.** Private label prices are generally set at a competitive level, so you can make savings compared to manufacturer brands without waiting for 'specials'.
- **Are quality assured.** Much like the big manufacturer brands, retailers say that because their

What you told us

"My wife and I are very concerned about choice — choice in the supermarkets, that is, or lack of it. The big-name stores are producing their own products, which seem to be helping to push Australian products off the shelf, and we feel we're getting squeezed into buying foreign-owned products instead. We're concerned about Australia's future, as everyday Australian owned-and-made products are just disappearing. We're worried even our buying power has been taken away because of the monopoly the large stores have."

Daniel and Simone Yakich, Warriewood, NSW.



"I have found that the range of brands on the supermarket shelves seems to be diminishing. House brand products are taking up a lot of shelf space and there's sometimes very little other choice except, say, for one high-priced brand."

Janet Russell, Aranda, ACT.



"I've noticed recently that the major supermarkets are increasing the number of overseas products in their house brand range and I'm worried about the impact this will have on the farming and food processing sectors in Australia. I have been shopping elsewhere for Australian-made generic brands or have been paying a bit extra for Australian-made branded equivalents."

David Henderson, Newtown, NSW.



name or symbol is on the package, you're assured that the product meets their stringent quality standards and specifications. Retailers are also making guarantees that their private label items consist of the same or better ingredients than manufacturer brands.

■ **Can have value added.** In the premium tier, retailers aim to introduce strongly differentiated (unique) products, and give a better choice of better products — ultimately providing an alternative to shopping in niche stores, such as delicatessens.

PRIVATE LABEL PITFALLS

With the increase in private label products in supermarkets, two areas of concern for shoppers (as highlighted in some unsolicited comments received by CHOICE, above) have been raised:

■ **Less choice.** Supermarkets have limited shelf space, so in order to fit in their own products, they need to cut back slow-selling lines. The top one or two market-leading brands will remain on the

shelves, but smaller brands may be squeezed off to make way for the private labels — indeed some already have been.

You may not notice it in categories like biscuits, where brands are numerous, or cereals, where there's such a large choice of products. But where you only have a few options already, like baked beans or tomato paste, the disappearance of a brand is more obvious — particularly if it was your favourite.

■ **Fewer Australian-owned and made products.** Both Coles and Woolies say that where possible they will source private label products from local producers, as long as they meet their specifications — which include quality and quantity at the right price. Some industry members say it's only at the budget end of private label that the retailers are more likely to turn to overseas producers for the volume or price differential they're after, and that this is no different from how it is now — local producers don't always compete against overseas suppliers on a level playing field.

For example, retailers can source the ingredients for canned vegetables from Belgium at a much lower cost than from local suppliers, because they're heavily subsidised by the EU. Similarly, a lot of the canned and frozen vegetables sold in Australia come from China, where labour and produce are far cheaper. And with the current high exchange rate of the Australian dollar, local producers are at a further disadvantage.

From Australian producers' point of view, they have a couple of options in the fight to retain shelf space:

■ **Rationalise the brands they produce** — merging or disposing of non-core brands, and focusing on core brands — to reduce costs, and then strengthen these brands through advertising, quality, value-adding and innovation to help differentiate their products from private label.

■ **Supply private labels.** It can be a struggle for smaller companies to compete with the marketing budgets of big brands, so supplying private labels allows them to reduce their overheads and concentrate on manufacturing.

The full impact of the new private label ranges on Australian producers is hard to judge, but as the Australian Food and Grocery Council told us, "For some companies, depending on their position in the market, private label manufacturing may represent an opportunity, while for others it may represent a threat."

Ultimately, Coles and Woolworths dominate the supermarket business in Australia and where they lead, it's hard not to follow. In the UK and USA no single supermarket chain has such a concentration of power — in Britain, for example, the top 12 supermarkets have less than 60% of the packaged goods market, compared to the 70–74% share held in Australia by Woolworths and Coles Myer alone. So any decisions made by Coles and Woolworths have a big impact on both consumers and manufacturers.

Overseas supermarket scene

Compared with 28% in Britain, well over 20% in most European markets and 16% in North America, Australia's private label share of the market is so far relatively small. But with Coles modelling its private label strategy on supermarkets like Asda and Tesco in the UK, it's likely to increase.

Walking into Tesco you're confronted with a sea of private label products — no wonder, when its private label products are up to 50% of the total. For practically every product that's on the shelves, there's a Tesco-branded variety in at least one of its tiers. Not only does it have a budget range (TESCO VALUE), mid-range (TESCO) and premium range (TESCO FINEST), it also offers ranges for the health-conscious (TESCO HEALTHY LIVING), the carb-conscious (TESCO CARB CONTROL), kids (TESCO KIDS), customers with allergies or intolerances (TESCO FREE FROM) and an organic range (TESCO ORGANIC).

Could this be the kind of branding spree we'll find in our supermarkets in the next few years?

DOES IT MATTER WHERE IT COMES FROM?

There's a lot of argument about it, but buying 'Australian' to support local producers or for the good of the country's economy is a simplistic way of looking at a complex situation. Australia functions and trades in a global market, and (without going into the lengthy arguments here) there's not a lot of strong evidence for the argument that a groundswell of consumer demand for Australian products would stimulate manufacturing, create jobs and benefit the whole economy. Other local and international factors are likely to have a stronger influence on the economy than how we fill our supermarket trolleys.

On top of this there's the whole question of whether Australian-owned or Australian-made





matters more. With the falling cost of manufacturing, where a company spends its revenues, pays its taxes, employs its staff, etc., can have a bigger impact than where its products are sourced or made.

Add to that our confusing and imprecise country of origin labelling (regularly highlighted on our *Hard Word* page) and you have a shopping minefield that makes it very hard to make a properly informed choice anyway.

From a consumer viewpoint, too, focusing on where a product comes from is a distraction from the main issues. To choose Australian regardless of the quality or price means you risk spending more than you need to, giving unearned profits to producers who find they can sell on their Australian-made (or owned) status, regardless of value.

To keep the market honest, when you're buying, first decide which products are of the type, quality and price you want. When you've narrowed your choice to those, then pick an (apparently) Australian product over an imported one if that's your preference. ■

Turning the screw...

With supermarkets and manufacturers in competition for your dollar, increasingly they'll be trying to influence and manipulate your shopping habits and buying decisions. Here are some marketing tactics and catch-phrases we've heard banded around:

- **Maximise in-store conversion.** Increase the proportion of people who walk into a store for the basics and then go on to purchase additional items — for example, you may have only had pasta on your shopping list, but chances are you'll find yourself walking out with pasta sauce as well.
- **Trade up consumers.** Within a product category, offer products with value-added innovation. The theory is that if it appears to deliver more, we'll be willing to forgo savings and pay a premium for the 'superior' brand.
- **Deliver an experience.** Don't just sell a product. Apparently we consumers want an experience when shopping, and are willing to pay a premium for it.
- **Expand into new channels or blur channels.** Supermarkets are no longer just for groceries — they sell CDs, clothes and barbecues as well.

THE BRANDS EXPLAINED

Woolies has so far launched just one new private label brand (**WOOLWORTHS SELECT**), while Coles' new private label brands have three tiers:

- **COLES SMART BUY:** "Never beaten on price; matches the best quality for the price; choice covers the basic weekly needs of a family."
- **YOU'LL LOVE COLES:** "Cheaper than the leading brand(s); equal to or better than the quality of the leading brand; choice across all major categories."
- **GEORGE J COLES:** "Cheaper than the equivalent brand; best in class; 'leading edge' with innovation."

A COUPLE OF TIPS

- To try to find smaller brands that aren't even stocked in the major supermarkets, shop at independents like **IGA** (stores that are owned and operated independently but buy goods from a common wholesale and distribution system).
- Where quality and price are equal, if you prefer to buy Australian, look for food products marked as 'product of Australia'. Unlike 'made in...' it means each significant ingredient must originate in Australia, and all or most of the production processes must take place here.

Gluten confusion

Two CHOICE subscribers recently asked us how a product containing wheat can claim to be gluten-free. Gluten is a protein found in some cereals, including wheat and rye, and if you're allergic or intolerant to it — for example, if you have coeliac disease — it's important to avoid foods that contain it.

If you're gluten-intolerant and used to scrutinising ingredient lists for anything that contains wheat (which includes flour, artificial additives and even cornflour), it may come as a surprise that there are some products on the market that contain these ingredients, but which are still OK for you to eat.

This happens when the manufacturing process reduces the gluten component to such a degree that there's none detectable in the final product. Foods carrying a gluten-free claim must have been tested and found to contain no detectable gluten. By law, however, the manufacturer is still required to list all ingredients, which can cause confusion. If you're not sure, check with the manufacturer.



GENE ROSS

What's in a name?

Australian producers have already lost the use of various wine descriptors, such as champagne and burgundy, and now Greek cheesemakers have secured exclusive rights to use the name feta cheese.

A ruling by the Court of Justice of the European Communities has found that only Greek feta [*sic*] cheesemakers should have use of the name feta, under the European Union's protected designation of origin (PDO) scheme. PDOs are used to maintain a market advantage by describing foods and drinks that are produced, processed and prepared in a given geographical region using recognised knowledge.

Australian manufacturers of that particular crumbly, salty cheese will be affected, especially if they want to export. They'll have to come up with a new name, and subsequently repackage products and re-educate consumers. Anyone fancy a spinach and sheep's-milk-cheese-steeped-in-brine pie?



GENE ROSS

SPOILING YOUR OLIVE OIL?

Exposure to light can shorten the lifespan of oil, and researchers have now measured how much goodness we may lose from storing olive oil under the wrong conditions.

Olive oil contains lots of antioxidants, but a study has found that oil stored in clear bottles and exposed to supermarket lighting for 12 months can lose 30% of its content of the antioxidants tocopherols and carotenoids.

To keep your olive oil fresh, store it in an airtight container that doesn't allow light in — preferably a non-reactive metal container, such as stainless steel, or a dark glass bottle. Keep it in a cool, dark cupboard, and don't buy in bulk to save money if it'll take you a long time to get through all the oil. A 'packed on' date on the bottle would be useful.

UNCORKED

We put the wine lover's must-have implement — the cork extractor — to the test.

Ever wanted to relax with a good bottle of wine, only to get completely stressed out opening the damn thing? Corks that refuse point-blank to come out, or break your corkscrew, using so much force to get a cork out that you end up splashing the wine (inevitably red) all over yourself; wine with cork crumbs bobbing round in it ... it's no wonder they've introduced screwtops on wine.

If you're still drinking wine sealed with a cork, though, it's worth investing in a decent corkscrew — better called a cork extractor, as not all have a traditional screw.

TYPES

There are many types of cork extractor available. Some are pretty intuitive to use; others may take time to get familiar with if you haven't used them before. We shopped around for a cross-section, returning with 16 that fell into the following six types:

- The classic and compact single lever, or waiter's friend.
- The double or wing lever, with a pair of 'wings' that rise as you insert the screw.
- The continuous screw or reverse thread, which only requires one continuous twisting motion to extract the cork.
- The lever pull, where you insert the screw into the cork with one lever action and pull the cork out with another.
- The butler's friend, which has two steel springs to grip and remove the cork and insert it again.
- The pump cork extractor, which uses the pressure of air or gas pumped into the bottle through the cork to push it out.



THE TRIAL

We asked eight occasional or regular wine quaffers to trial the 16 cork extractors, asking them to rate and comment on clarity of instructions (if there were any), how easy it was to insert the device into the cork, remove the cork from the bottle and then from the device, and finally, how comfortable the corkscrew was to hold. From the panellists' individual ratings we calculated an overall rating that's given in the profiles.

THE VERDICT

Judging from our panellists' ratings and comments, the price of a corkscrew doesn't seem to predict its popularity. The panellists tested the corkscrews without knowing their retail price, and neither the cheapest nor most expensive models were rated best. The top four were priced from \$25 to \$40.

Our panellists generally preferred a compact and safe design that's easy to store and take with you and unlikely to do any damage (there were concerns about the two pump models). Larger models like the **AVANTI Professional Wine Opener** elicited comments such as "bulky" and "... impossible (to use) for a weaker person". They rated best those corkscrews that were easy to use, comfortable to hold and had simple instructions or an intuitive design. For what to buy, see *The best*, page 32.

IN A NUTSHELL

- A variety of corkscrews from \$25–\$40 got the thumbs-up.
- Our trialists didn't show a preference for any particular type of cork extractor. Those that were compact, simple and comfortable to use got the highest ratings, regardless of type.

Profiles

As the cork extractors tested look quite different from each other, we've pictured and profiled them all in rank order — the best and the rest. Types are explained on page 31; quotes are from our trialists; and prices are what we paid in August 2005 or recommended retail, as indicated.

THE BEST

OXO GOOD GRIPS CORK PULL 31880

Price: \$39.95

Overall score: 88%

Our trialists were impressed with the clear instructions and lack of effort needed to use this continuous-twist corkscrew with a comfortably padded, wide grip.

■ "Very easy to take the cork out of the bottle and remove it [from the corkscrew]."

■ "Nice and easy. Copes with wide-topped bottles too."



PULL IT LEVER CORKSCREW 4003

Price: \$40 (rrp)

Overall score: 86%

Although many of the trialists hadn't used a lever-pull corkscrew before, they found this one easy to use, once familiar with the design. There were concerns about the size, though — it won't slip easily into a drawer. The instructions also say it's not designed for use with synthetic corks — tricky, as you may not know what kind of cork a bottle has till you open it.

■ "Super-fast — cork out and off in less than 10 seconds."

■ "Would appeal to the techno-freak."



ZYLISS CORKSCREW WITH FOIL CUTTER 20-110

Price: \$36.95

Overall score: 84%

Panelists liked this continuous-screw model for its simplicity and compactness.

■ "Exactly the right size to handle and shove in a kitchen drawer."

■ "Small, easy to use, but doesn't work on wide necks."



OXO GOOD GRIPS WINGED CORKSCREW 1057960

Price: \$24.95

Overall score: 80%

A comfortable corkscrew of the classic and simple wing design, which most panelists had used before. It was the preferred choice of a panelist with arthritic wrists, who found it easy to twist.

■ "Comfortable to use, no sharp edges."

■ "Elegant design, easy to use."



THE REST

ARGYLE LEVER PULL CORKSCREW

Price: \$39.95

Overall score: 72%

A fast and easy to use lever-pull corkscrew, but quite bulky. As with the PULL IT Lever Corkscrew, the manufacturer says it's not designed for synthetic corks.



BRABANTIA CORKSCREW 108810

Price: \$20.95

Overall score: 72%

A simple design and relatively easy to use, but trialists found it difficult to remove the cork from this continuous-screw model.



D-LINE BARTENDER FRENCH STYLE WAITER'S CORKSCREW 7006

Price: \$15 (rrp)

Overall score: 72%

While some trialists liked the compactness of this waiter's friend, others found it difficult to use and hold — it's stainless steel, neither coated nor padded.



CORK POPS 3WF 12245

Price: \$72.50

Overall score: 70%

Our trialists liked the novelty value of this — it uses gas to extract corks with an audible 'pop' — but they only gave it an average overall rating. It contains the propellant R-134A (tetrafluoroethane) and carries a warning that its contents are under pressure and to keep it away from children. You can't use it on odd-shaped bottles, and the gas needs replacing after you've opened 50 bottles — more expense for this already pricey cork extractor.



CHEF CRAFT PREMIUM WING CORKSCREW

Price: \$8

Overall score: 63%

A competitively priced wing corkscrew that panelists found fairly easy to use, but a bit "messier" than others of this type.



ARGYLE COUTALE

Price: \$19.95

Overall score: 62%

While some trialists liked this simple, compact waiter's friend, others criticised its poor instructions (basically, a series of pictures).

D-LINE BARTENDER WING CORKSCREW 7011

Price: \$26 (rrp)

Overall score: 55%

This relatively heavy wing corkscrew shredded several corks in the trial.

ZANGEL-ICEL WAITER'S FRIEND

Price: \$18.95

Overall score: 55%

A mediocre example of the classic waiter's friend design — no padding or coating, just stainless steel.

MONOPOL EXQUISIT THE BUTLER'S FRIEND AH-50

Price: \$29.95

Overall score: 52%

While some trialists appreciated being able to put the cork back into the bottle with this butler's friend, others thought it difficult, or at least "a challenge", to pull the cork out.

AVANTI STOCKHOLM COLLECTION AUTO CORKSCREW 16389

Price: \$27 (rrp)

Overall score: 48%

This continuous-screw model looks sleek and stylish enough — one trialist labelled it "for the design tragic" — but it had trialists struggling to get the cork out of the opener.

D-LINE BARTENDER DE-CORKER CORK REMOVER

Price: \$18.95

Overall score: 46%

With this cork extractor you're supposed to pump air into the bottle to remove the cork, but its instructions were poor. There were concerns about the sharp needle, and one trialist got sprayed with wine in their attempt to remove the cork. Only two (out of eight) succeeded, and after the second successful attempt the needle broke off.



FOR YOUR BAR

The AVANTI Professional Wine Opener 16117 (\$80 rrp) is a large, professional wine opener that isn't portable like the others — it's designed to be fixed to a table or the edge of your bar. It received a 60% overall score in the trial — some of the men thought it worked well, but the women generally found it required a lot of strength to operate. If you open a lot of wine at home and have the space for it, it could be just what the cellar master ordered, though it's very bulky.



Arthritic hands?

Consider the points below if you have arthritis in your hands or poor hand strength.

- Corkscrews with a large, rounded handle are easier to grip than those with narrow handles or requiring fine movements.
- Wing corkscrews can be difficult to hold onto when first inserting the screw. That said, the trialist with arthritic wrists found the OXO Good Grips Winged Corkscrew most suitable, as it's comfortable to hold, easy to twist and lacks sharp edges.
- According to the Independent Living Centre NSW (ILC), if the wings are gear-driven, you don't need much strength to extract the cork. In comparison, our trialist with arthritis found the two well-rated continuous corkscrews (OXO Good Grips Cork Pull 31880 and ZYLISS Corkscrew with Foil Cutter 20110) required more strength to extract the cork.
- The ILC recommends experimenting with different models to find the one that best suits your needs.

Does your car have the security you want?

BEAT THE CROOKS

IN A NUTSHELL

- There are big differences in how easy it is for thieves to steal or break into different car models.
- Personal security features can provide some extra protection in dangerous situations.

There are various aspects of car security: how easy it is to steal a car, to strip it and sell parts, and to break into it and steal from it. Data from NRMA Insurance in the table lets you compare models for all these factors.

THEFT RATING

In 2004, about 85,000 cars were stolen in Australia. The figure has been declining dramatically over the past few years, largely as a result of the more widespread use of immobilisers. All new passenger cars sold in Australia now have to have a factory-fitted immobiliser, and initiatives such as 'Immobilise Now!'

TABLE NOTES

1 Theft rating

This is a weighted calculation, combining the scores for ease of entry, vehicle identification and theft resistance. The maximum score is 120.

2 Ease of entry

Looks at how easy it is to break into the car and steal something from it. It assesses features such as door lock support, lock mechanisms, alarm system, security of the stereo system, no lock cylinder in the trunk lid, locking wheel nuts and lockable split-fold rear seats. The maximum score is 100.

3 Vehicle identification

Looks at the number of vehicle identification number (VIN) body stampings on the vehicle, self-voiding security labels and microdots. These make it easier to identify car parts, and therefore more difficult to sell stolen parts. The maximum score is 100.

4 Theft resistance

Looks at the level of security provided by the vehicle's engine immobiliser. The maximum score is 100.

5 Personal security rating

The personal security rating gives one point for each of the protective features listed

below. The maximum score is therefore 14.

1 Two-stage unlocking:

Allows you to unlock just the driver's door to prevent someone from entering your car from the passenger side.

2 Interior light on when door unlocked:

Activated by the remote, to let you see if anyone is inside.

3 Interior light on when ignition switched off:

Illuminates the cabin so the driver can gather belongings before exiting the car.

4 Panic alert: Button on the remote to sound the car's horn, or flash lights.

5 Lights flash with door unlock: To briefly illuminate

by the National Motor Vehicle Theft Reduction Council (reported on in CHOICE, November 2001) have resulted in many older cars being fitted with one too.

But theft of the entire car is only part of the problem. You also want a car that makes it difficult for thieves to steal from it, or to steal and sell parts of it. Many of the cars in the table score zero for protection from parts being stolen — it seems to be an area mainly covered by high-end and/or luxury models at the moment. In general, therefore, a score of 50 points (out of a maximum of 120) is currently regarded as a reasonable theft rating.

If you have a garage and access to secure parking at work, your car is less often at risk than one that's parked on the street a lot — so a high theft rating may not be as important.

NRMA Insurance regularly assesses a range of new models, and the result affects insurance premiums and provides feedback for manufacturers.

PERSONAL SECURITY RATING

Fortunately Australia's not a country where car-jackings or violent assaults on drivers are a common occurrence. However, many new cars come with a range of features that are convenient in everyday use and can improve your personal security should you ever get into a dangerous situation.

NRMA Insurance regularly checks new cars for 14 such features (see note 5, below) and rates them accordingly.

For a limited time, you can read the full list of features for the cars in this article on www.choiceextra.com.au, under 'car security' in the index.

the area outside the car so you can see whether anyone's lurking.

6 Headlight timer: After you've left your car the headlights light your way out of a dark car park and switch off after a set time.

7 Deadlocking locks:

8 Anti-hijacking door locking: Locks the doors either as the vehicle drives away, or 'drive' is selected on the automatic transmission. Some vehicles have a door lock button on the dash or the driver's armrest for manual operation.

9 Headlights on with remote: This can help light up the way to the vehicle at night.

10 In-car assistance: Allows

you to alert a helpline from your vehicle when needed (for example, Holden Assist).

11 In-car navigation: Offers audio and visual assistance (such as electronic maps) to find your way around.

12 Safety side glass: Laminated or double-thick glass provides extra protection against unauthorised entry.

13 Power windows operate with ignition off: Allows you to put electric windows up or down after the ignition has been switched off.

14 Not locked warning: Warns you if the vehicle isn't locked properly when you try to lock it with the entry remote.

Models (in order of theft rating)	1 Theft rating (out of 120)	2 Ease of entry (out of 100)	3 Vehicle ID (out of 100)	4 Theft resistance (out of 100)	5 Personal security rating (out of 14)
SMALL CARS					
MINI Cooper S, 3-door hatch	99	65	100	85	6
AUDI A3, 3-door hatch	86	80	0	100	8
VW Polo Elite, 5-door hatch*	83	68	0	100	7
MAZDA 2, 5-door hatch	65	50	0	85	1
CITROEN C3 Pluriel, 3-door hatch*	64	70	0	75	6
CITROEN C2 VTR, 3-door hatch*	63	65	0	75	7
FORD Fiesta, 3-door hatch*	61	36	0	85	2
CITROEN C3 Exclusive, 5-door hatch	60	53	0	75	5
MITSUBISHI Colt LS, 5-door hatch*	60	33	0	85	4
SUZUKI Swift VVT, 5-door hatch*	58	33	0	85	5
HYUNDAI Getz sedan, 3-door hatch	57	25	0	85	3
KIA Cerato EX, 5-door hatch*	52	3	0	85	5
KIA Cerato EX, sedan	52	3	0	85	5
SMART Pulse, 3-door hatch	52	45	0	65	3
KIA Rio LS, 5-door hatch*	51	0	0	85	1
HOLDEN Barina CD, 5-door hatch*	50	25	0	75	6
RENAULT Clio Privilege 1.6, 5-door hatch	50	43	0	65	4
RENAULT Clio Sport, 3-door hatch	50	43	0	65	4
RENAULT Clio 1.4 Expression, 5-door hatch	46	25	0	65	3
PEUGEOT 206 CC, cabriolet	45	30	0	65	3
DAIHATSU Charade, 3-door hatch	44	23	0	65	2
MITSUBISHI Mirage CE, 3-door hatch	43	19	0	65	4
TOYOTA Echo Sportiva 1.5, 3-door hatch	43	20	0	65	2
SUZUKI Ignis, 5-door hatch	42	15	0	65	3
DAIHATSU Copen, cabriolet	41	8	0	65	2
DAIHATSU YRV, 5-door hatch	40	3	0	65	0
SUZUKI Ignis Sport, 3-door hatch	40	3	0	65	2
TOYOTA Echo VVTi, 3-door hatch*	40	5	0	65	1
KIA Spectra LS, 5-door hatch	39	0	0	65	1
HONDA Jazz, 5-door hatch*	31	33	0	40	3
HONDA Jazz GLi, sedan	29	23	0	40	0
KIA Rio LS, sedan	21	8	0	33	0
DAEWOO Kalos SE, 3-door hatch	20	3	0	33	1
DAEWOO Matiz SE, 5-door hatch	20	3	0	33	0
SMALL-MEDIUM CARS					
MINI Cooper, cabriolet*	107	73	90	100	7
BMW 120i, 3-door hatch*	95	40	90	100	7
AUDI A3 1.6, 3-door hatch*	87	83	0	100	8
SUBARU Impreza RS 2.5, 5-door hatch*	83	8	100	85	3
VW New Beetle, 3-door hatch	82	65	0	100	6
SUBARU Impreza RS, sedan*	81	0	100	85	3
VW Golf 2.0 Tdi, 5-door hatch*	78	63	0	100	9
VOVO S40 2.4i, sedan*	76	55	0	100	9
VW Golf 2.0 Sport, 5-door hatch	76	55	0	100	5

Models (in order of theft rating)	1 Theft rating (out of 120)	2 Ease of entry (out of 100)	3 Vehicle ID (out of 100)	4 Theft resistance (out of 100)	5 Personal security rating (out of 14)
MAZDA 3, 5-door hatch*	73	49	30	85	4
MAZDA 3 SP23, sedan*	73	49	30	85	nt
RENAULT Mégane Sport, 5-door wagon*	73	56	20	85	7
FORD Focus ST 170, 3-door hatch	68	56	0	85	3
RENAULT Mégane, 5-door wagon	66	54	20	75	6
FORD Focus Ghia 2.0 L, sedan	62	41	0	85	3
HYUNDAI Elantra Lavita GLS, 5-door hatch	62	36	0	85	3
FORD Focus 1.8 L CL, 5-door hatch	61	35	0	85	2
FORD Focus Zetec 2.0, 5-door hatch	61	50	0	85	3
HOLDEN Astra CDX, 5-door hatch*	61	56	0	75	6
MITSUBISHI Lancer ES, station wagon*	61	35	0	85	3
PEUGEOT 307, 5-door hatch	60	45	0	65	6
HOLDEN Astra cabriolet, sedan	59	46	0	75	4
HOLDEN Astra Sri Turbo, coupé	59	46	0	75	3
PEUGEOT 307 CC, coupé*	59	58	0	75	7
MERCEDES BENZ A 160, 5-door hatch	56	35	0	75	4
CITROEN Xsara VTR, 3-door hatch	54	35	0	75	4
NISSAN Pulsar Q, 5-door hatch	53	50	0	65	6
NISSAN Pulsar ST 1.8, 5-door hatch	51	44	0	65	5
TOYOTA Prius, sedan*	51	43	0	65	5
HONDA Civic Hybrid, sedan*	50	23	0	75	3
MITSUBISHI Lancer ES, sedan	50	38	0	65	4
NISSAN Pulsar ST, sedan*	49	18	0	75	5
DAEWOO Nubira Limited, sedan	48	23	0	65	3
TOYOTA Corolla Ascent, sedan	48	31	0	65	1
TOYOTA Corolla Ascent, 5-door hatch	43	20	0	65	0
TOYOTA Corolla Conquest, sedan	43	20	0	65	2
DAEWOO Lacetti SX, sedan	41	5	0	65	2
SUZUKI Liana 1.6, 5-door hatch	41	5	0	65	3
SUZUKI Baleno, sedan	39	0	0	65	0
MEDIUM CARS					
SUBARU Liberty GT Turbo, sedan*	94	48	100	85	4
ROVER 75 Classic, sedan*	81	68	0	100	10
VW Bora, sedan	78	63	0	100	6
RENAULT Laguna Authentique, 5-door hatch	75	53	0	100	6
RENAULT Laguna Privilege V6, 5-door hatch	75	53	0	100	6
HOLDEN Vectra CD, sedan	66	69	0	75	9
HYUNDAI Sonata V6, sedan*	66	48	0	85	5
MAZDA 6 2.3 L, 5-door hatch	65	51	0	85	5
MAZDA 6 2.3 L, 5-door wagon	65	51	0	85	5
PEUGEOT 407 V6, sedan*	64	71	0	75	8
CITROEN C5, sedan	60	53	0	75	6
PEUGEOT 406, sedan	58	48	0	75	5
TOYOTA Camry Altise 4 cyl and V6, sedan	57	40	20	65	7

Continued overleaf

DRIVELINES: Car security

Models (in order of theft rating), continued	1 Theft rating (out of 120)	2 Ease of entry (out of 100)	3 Vehicle ID (out of 100)	4 Theft resistance (out of 100)	5 Personal security rating (out of 14)
CHRYSLER PT Cruiser Street Cruiser II, 5-door wagon	53	28	0	65	4
TOYOTA Camry Sportivo V6, sedan*	52	28	10	65	8
HONDA Accord Euro, sedan	48	43	0	65	5
HONDA Accord 3.0 L Vtec, sedan	47	35	0	65	7
DAEWOO Leganza 2.2, sedan	44	20	0	65	1
LARGE CARS					
MITSUBISHI Magna ES V6, sedan*	64	46	0	85	8
HOLDEN Commodore SS V8, sedan*	62	59	0	75	9
HOLDEN Commodore, sedan	61	56	0	75	9
HOLDEN Commodore Berlina, sedan	61	56	0	75	nt
FORD Falcon XT, sedan	58	33	0	85	8
TOYOTA Avalon Gxi, sedan	58	43	20	65	8
KIA Optima EX V6, sedan*	51	0	0	85	4
TOYOTA Avalon Grande MKIII, sedan*	51	25	10	65	nt
TOYOTA Avalon Vxi, sedan*	51	25	10	65	nt
KIA Optima SE V6, sedan	21	8	0	33	2
4WDs					
PORSCHE Cayenne S, 5-door wagon	111	73	100	100	6
BMW X3 3.0i, 5-door wagon*	95	40	90	100	8
SUBARU Outback 2.5, station wagon*	91	48	100	85	4
LAND ROVER Discovery 3, 5-door wagon*	84	75	0	100	12
BMW X5 3.0 L, 5-door wagon	83	40	100	75	6
VW Touareg, 5-door wagon	77	63	0	100	6
VOLVO XC90 2.5T AWD, 5-door wagon	76	55	0	100	5
SUBARU Forester 2.5 X, station wagon	71	8	100	65	3
LAND ROVER Range Rover, 5-door wagon	70	83	0	75	6
HYUNDAI Terracan CRDi, 5-door wagon*	63	43	0	85	4
MAZDA Tribute V6, 5-door wagon*	62	10	0	75	7
HOLDEN Adventra LX 8, station wagon*	61	51	0	75	9
MITSUBISHI Outlander LS, 5-door wagon*	61	33	0	85	4
FORD Territory Ghia, 5-door wagon*	58	33	0	85	9
HYUNDAI Tucson Elite, 5-door wagon*	56	23	0	85	4
MITSUBISHI Challenger, 5-door wagon*	56	23	0	85	3
MITSUBISHI Pajero Exceed, 5-door wagon*	56	25	0	85	5
TOYOTA Prado Grande, 4x4	54	50	0	65	5
LEXUS RX330, 4x4	53	48	0	65	9
TOYOTA Kluger CVX VVT V6, 5-door wagon*	52	20	0	75	5

Models (in order of theft rating)	1 Theft rating (out of 120)	2 Ease of entry (out of 100)	3 Vehicle ID (out of 100)	4 Theft resistance (out of 100)	5 Personal security rating (out of 14)
KIA Sorento EX, 5-door wagon*	51	0	0	85	5
HYUNDAI Terracan Highlander, 5-door wagon	50	38	0	65	4
HOLDEN Cruze AWD, 5-door hatch	49	18	0	65	2
FORD Escape XLS, 5-door wagon*	47	10	0	75	5
TOYOTA Landcruiser Sahara, 5-door wagon*	47	23	0	65	7
HONDA MDX 3.5 V6, 5-door wagon	46	33	0	65	6
TOYOTA RAV 4 Cruiser, 5-door wagon*	46	20	0	65	3
JEEP Wrangler Sport, 4x4*	45	28	0	65	1
LAND ROVER Defender 90 TD5, 3-door wagon	45	25	0	65	3
HOLDEN Jackaroo SE, 5-door wagon	44	23	0	65	3
NISSAN Pathfinder, 5-door wagon	44	23	0	65	2
NISSAN X Trail ST 2.5, 5-door hatch*	44	25	0	65	5
HYUNDAI Santa Fe GLS V6, 5-door wagon	40	3	0	65	4
SUZUKI Grand Vitara XLi-7, 5-door wagon	40	3	0	65	3
KIA Sportage, 5-door wagon	39	0	0	65	0
NISSAN Patrol ST 4.2, 5-door wagon*	39	0	0	65	2
HONDA CRV i-Vtec, 5-door wagon*	29	23	0	40	3
MITSUBISHI Outlander CU, 5-door wagon	29	33	0	33	4
DAIHATSU Terios DX, 5-door wagon	24	23	0	33	0
LUXURY CARS					
AUDI A6 4.2 Quattro, sedan*	117	90	95	100	7
AUDI A6 2.4, sedan*	107	65	95	100	7
AUDI A6 3.0 Quattro, sedan*	107	65	95	100	10
BMW 320i, station wagon	98	40	100	100	7
BMW 325 Ci, coupé	98	40	100	100	7
BMW 330 Ci, cabriolet	98	40	100	100	7
BMW 530i, sedan	98	40	100	100	5
BMW 735i, sedan	97	33	100	100	8
BMW 316 Ti, 3-door hatch	95	25	100	100	6
BMW 645 Ci, cabriolet*	94	33	90	100	9
BMW 645 Ci, coupé*	94	33	90	100	9
AUDI A8 4.2, sedan*	88	90	90	100	8
VW Bora, sedan	85	80	0	100	6
VW Passat V6, sedan	85	83	0	100	7
JAGUAR S Type V8, sedan*	84	79	0	100	9
LAMBORGHINI Gallardo, coupé	83	74	0	100	1
SAAB 9-3 Aero, sedan	83	78	0	100	8
MERCEDES BENZ S 430, sedan	81	65	0	100	6
MG ZT V8, sedan*	81	68	0	100	9
MERCEDES BENZ SL 500, coupé	80	63	0	100	8
AUDI A4 S line 1.8T Quattro, Avant*	77	58	0	100	6

Models (in order of theft rating)	1 Theft rating (out of 120)	2 Ease of entry (out of 100)	3 Vehicle ID (out of 100)	4 Theft resistance (out of 100)	5 Personal security rating (out of 14)
AUDI A6 3.0, sedan	77	63	0	100	6
AUDI A4 2.0 Avant, station wagon	76	55	0	100	6
AUDI A4 3.0, cabriolet	76	55	0	100	6
VOLVO V50 T5, estate*	76	55	0	100	7
VOLVO V70R AWD, station wagon*	76	55	0	100	8
MERCEDES BENZ C 180 Classic, sedan	75	58	0	100	6
MERCEDES BENZ C 180 Kompressor, sedan*	75	53	0	100	6
JAGUAR X Type AWD 3.0, sedan*	73	71	0	85	7
JAGUAR X Type Heritage, sedan	73	69	0	85	10
MERCEDES BENZ CLK 500 Elegance, cabriolet*	73	45	0	100	8
SAAB 9-5 2.3t, sedan	70	79	0	75	6
JAGUAR XJ 8 V8, sedan	68	74	0	75	9
ALFA ROMEO 156 GTA, sedan	66	65	0	75	5
JAGUAR S Type R, sedan	62	53	0	75	9
HOLDEN Statesman V6, sedan	61	56	0	75	9
LEXUS GS430, sedan*	59	48	0	75	10
ALFA ROMEO GT, 3-door hatch*	58	48	0	75	7
FORD Fairlane, sedan	58	25	0	85	9
ALFA ROMEO 156 JTS, sedan	57	43	0	75	5
ALFA ROMEO 147 GTA, 3-door hatch*	56	40	0	75	7
ALFA ROMEO 166 V6, sedan	56	40	0	75	3
LEXUS IS 300, sedan	55	53	0	65	5
LEXUS SC 430, cabriolet	55	53	0	65	10
NISSAN Maxima, sedan*	52	33	0	75	5

SPORTS CARS

MITSUBISHI Lancer EVO VIII, sedan*	105	38	100	100	5
BMW Z4, roadster	102	43	100	100	7
SUBARU Impreza WRX, sedan*	100	25	100	100	4
SUBARU Impreza WRX Sti, sedan	100	25	100	100	4
SUBARU Impreza WRX WRP10, sedan*	100	25	100	100	nt
PORSCHE 996 Carrera, coupé	98	78	100	75	6
BMW M3, coupé	97	33	100	100	8
HOLDEN HSV Clubsport, sedan	93	64	100	75	8
FORD FPV Falcon F6 Typhoon, sedan*	91	53	90	85	9
AUDI TT 1.8T Roadster, coupé	84	80	0	100	6
AUDI TT 1.8T Tiptronic, coupé	84	80	0	100	6
AUDI RS6, sedan	82	75	0	100	7
AUDI S4 4.2, sedan*	81	68	0	100	7
CHRYSLER Crossfire V6, coupé*	80	65	0	100	4
VW Golf GTi, 5-door hatch*	79	68	0	100	9
MAZDA RX-8, 5-door hatch	65	51	0	85	4
HOLDEN Monaro V2 Series II CV6, coupé	63	64	0	75	9
MG TF, cabriolet*	63	58	0	75	6
HOLDEN Monaro CV8, coupé*	62	59	0	75	9

Models (in order of theft rating)	1 Theft rating (out of 120)	2 Ease of entry (out of 100)	3 Vehicle ID (out of 100)	4 Theft resistance (out of 100)	5 Personal security rating (out of 14)
FORD Falcon Mk II XR8, sedan*	59	40	0	85	8
HYUNDAI Tiburon V6, coupé*	57	25	0	85	2
TOYOTA Celica SX, coupé	49	33	0	65	4
TOYOTA Corolla Sportivo 1.8, 5-door hatch	48	31	0	65	4
NISSAN 350 Z 3.5 V6, coupé	47	8	0	75	5
ALFA ROMEO GTV/Spider 2.0 T Spark, coupé	46	5	0	75	1
MAZDA MX-5 1.8, roadster	44	13	0	65	1
NISSAN 200 SX Spec R, coupé	39	0	0	65	4
HONDA S 2000, cabriolet	34	33	0	40	2
HONDA Integra i-Vtec 2.0, 3-door hatch*	30	30	0	40	4
PEOPLE MOVERS					
VW Multivan Tdi, van*	76	55	0	100	7
VW Caravelle Tdi	65	23	0	100	2
MITSUBISHI Grandis, 5-door wagon*	64	48	0	85	4
MAZDA MPV, van*	61	36	0	85	2
HOLDEN Zafira	58	44	0	75	4
HYUNDAI Trajet V6 2.7 L, 5-door wagon	56	23	0	85	2
KIA Carnival LS, 5-door hatch*	51	0	0	85	2
CHRYSLER Voyager Grand LX	49	20	0	75	4
TOYOTA Tarago Ultima	49	33	0	65	4
TOYOTA Avenis Verso GLX	48	36	0	65	4
HONDA Odyssey 2.4 L*	46	33	0	65	5
DAEWOO Tacuma CDX, 5-door hatch	44	20	0	65	1
MAZDA Premacy, 5-door wagon	40	2.5	0	65	5

VANS / UTES

FORD FPV Falcon F6 Tornador, ute*	90	45	90	85	8
HOLDEN Commodore, ute	60	49	0	75	9
HOLDEN Crewman CrossX6, 4-door ute*	59	48	0	75	8
VW Transporter Diesel Turbo, cab chassis	55	18	0	85	1
FORD Courier XLT, ute*	52	3	0	85	5
HOLDEN Combo XC, cargo van	50	25	0	75	0
HOLDEN Rodeo LX V6, space cab	49	33	0	65	2
KIA K2700, cab chassis*	15	0	10	20	3
PROTON Jumbuck GLXi, ute	15	5	0	14	3
MAZDA Bravo Boss, cab chassis*	0	0	0	0	0
TOYOTA Hilux S2.7 Efi, ute	0	0	0	0	0

nt Not tested.

* Assessed in 2005, all other models in 2004.

Source: NRMA Insurance 2004/2005.

Clean and clear

... can you have it all?



PHOTO: GENE BRASS

IN A NUTSHELL

■ Results for 42 washing machines, including 10 newly tested models.

■ All six of the top loaders but only one of the four front loaders in this latest test rinsed effectively, according to the new Australian/New Zealand standard.

■ Front loaders in general tend to be noisier than top loaders during the normal spin cycle.

The 10 newly tested models ranged in price from \$749 to \$1699, and we've added them to the list of previously tested machines that are still on the market (see the table, page 42).

WASHING CLEAN?

With so many bells and whistles to consider on some models, the most basic task of a washing machine — to wash well — could almost be forgotten. In this latest test the two machines that were best at removing dirt were the front-loading ELECTROLUX Jetsystem EW 1280F, followed by the top-loading FISHER & PAYKEL Pride MW512.

On the other hand we weren't impressed by the comparatively poor dirt removal performance of two larger WESTINGHOUSE top-loading machines on test

this time — the LT819S and the LT959S — which, with 48% and 50% dirt removal respectively, ranked among the lowest in the table. We tested them again to check the results, but got very similar scores.

We were concerned enough to contact the manufacturer (ELECTROLUX), which said the performance might be explained by production variations associated with early samples, so we agreed to test two later samples. Again we found comparatively poor dirt removal results. ELECTROLUX says its machines are "optimised for typical Australian consumers' washing habits" identified in its field research, rather than for a laboratory simulation. We're not sure what that means, unless it's a reflection of the fact that a lot of people wash clothes that aren't very dirty to start with, unlike our test swatches.

TIMES ARE A-CHANGING

To encourage more careful use of our water and energy resources, new water efficiency star labelling will replace the voluntary 'A'-rating system and become compulsory for washing machines as of 1 July 2006, and will be followed in December 2006 by revised energy labelling. (See *New water labelling*, page 41, for more on this.) But washing machines have a job to do — they should still work well under these changing conditions, not just use less water and energy.

Along with the new labelling changes a rinse effectiveness test was added to the Australian/New Zealand Standard for performance testing in September 2005, to measure how well machines remove dissolved dirt and detergent residue. From 1 July this year it will be mandatory to pass this test.

The news for the newly tested machines is mostly good. Only three front loaders didn't rinse effectively enough according to the new test: the ARISTON AVXL 105, BOSCH Maxx 1200 WFO 2460 AU and BOSCH Maxx 1000 WFO 2060 AU, although the two BOSCHs have extra rinse cycles that we didn't test.

NOISE IN THE MACHINE?

A reader told us recently that he finds the noise from the spin cycle of his front-loading washing machine disturbing, and he's not alone. Some of us are more sensitive to sound than others but most would agree that the quieter a household appliance is, the better.

The machines in the table range in spin-cycle loudness from 54 dB to 68 dB, which might not seem

WHAT TO BUY

Most of the machines in the table were tested in the past. The table, *What to buy* list and **Best Buys** change from test to test as products are discontinued or their prices change, and new products enter.

Best Buy indicates that a model is a reasonable performer in its size range and its combined purchase price and running costs are comparatively low. The other models in the *What to buy* list are the top performers overall in their size bracket, but they won't be as cheap to buy and/or run as the **Best Buys**. We've included top and front loaders in each size range.

SMALL (UP TO 5.5 KG)

MIELE Novotronic W502 (fr)	\$1699
New FISHER & PAYKEL Pride MW512 (tp)	\$749
New FISHER & PAYKEL Excellence GW512 (tp)	\$859
SIMPSON Eziset 550 36550L (tp) ▶ BEST BUY	\$669

MEDIUM (6-7 KG)

SAMSUNG J1045 (fr)	\$999
SAMSUNG J845 (fr) ▶ BEST BUY	\$849
AEG Lavamat W1250 Electronic (fr)	\$1499
New BOSCH Maxx 1200 WFO 2460 AU (fr)	\$1699
New ELECTROLUX Jetsystem EW 1280F (fr)	\$1219
WESTINGHOUSE LT609S Complete Care (tp) ▶ BEST BUY	\$799

LARGE (7.5 KG OR MORE)

ARISTON AVXL 129 (fr) ▶ BEST BUY	\$1549
LG WD-1019BD (fr)	\$1999
FISHER & PAYKEL Intuitive Eco IW812 (tp) ▶ BEST BUY	\$1285

fr = front loader tp = top loader

so dramatic on paper, but it's roughly the difference between a quiet conversation and a loud one.

In case this is an important issue for you, we've put together a list of the *What to buy* machines that are quieter (62 dB or less, from quietest to loudest):

- FISHER & PAYKEL Pride MW512: top loader, 5.5 kg, 54 dB.
- FISHER & PAYKEL Excellence GW512: top loader, 5.5 kg, 55 dB.
- BOSCH Maxx 1200 WFO 2460 AU: front loader, 6.5 kg, 61 dB.
- ELECTROLUX Jetsystem EW 1280F: front loader, 6.5 kg, 61 dB.
- LG WD-1019BD: front loader, 10 kg, 61 dB.
- MIELE Novotronic W502: front loader, 5.5 kg, 62 dB.
- WESTINGHOUSE LT609S Complete Care: top loader, 6 kg, 62 dB.

As a general guide, front loaders have a louder spin cycle than top loaders, owing to their faster spin speed. That's only part of the story, though: they also often have a higher pitch. So while front loaders tend to be gentler on your clothes, they might not be so gentle on your household if their noise bothers you.

For people with a disability

An occupational therapist from the Independent Living Centre (NSW) assessed the washing machines with a number of different types of disability in mind.

- If you're a wheelchair user or have back problems, a front-loading machine will give the easiest access, particularly if it's elevated to a suitable height. Look for a wide opening and a door that opens 180°. Front loaders that stand out as having good access include the ARISTON AVXL 105, ELECTROLUX Jetsystem EW 1280F, ASKO Quattro W6021 and AEG Lavamat W1250; of the top loaders, the FISHER & PAYKEL Excellence GW512 and Pride MW512.
- If you have difficulty with hand or upper limb dexterity, look for keypad controls that are easy to press, grip or otherwise use, and one-touch or programming functions that minimise manual demands. Also check that the door is easy to open and that detergent and fabric softener dispensers are easy to pull out or clean. A suitable top loader is the WESTINGHOUSE LT609S Complete Care, which is easy to open and has a small, shallow drum that means it's easier to reach into. Front loaders are generally a better option, particularly for people with shoulder problems; suitable models include the ARISTON AVXL 105, ASKO Quattro W6021, BOSCH Maxx 1000 WFL2000 and MIELE Novotronic W502.
- If you have a visual impairment, labels and controls will be easier to use if they're large, well-spaced and contrasting — black or dark-coloured writing on white is easiest to read. Also look for audio or visual feedback like beeps when you push buttons, and models that allow for one-touch or favourite programming. The FISHER & PAYKEL, SIMPSON Eziset machines, WESTINGHOUSE LT609S Complete Care, LG WF-T65TH, HOOVER 600M Heavy Duty and AEG Lavamat W1250 would be most suitable.

WANT HELP CHOOSING?

For a limited time you have access to our 'compare-a-washer' tool to help you choose a machine that will suit your needs. Go to www.choiceextra.com.au and click on 'Compare-a-washer' under 'Washing machines' in the index.



Profiles: new top performers

For profiles of models in the *What to buy* list that aren't included here, see CHOICE, September 2005, September 2004 or March 2004, or go to www.choiceextra.com.au and click on the dates above under 'washing machines' in the index.

If you're a personal subscriber to CHOICE and don't have the relevant back issue or access to the internet, please phone our Consumer Services people on 1800 069 552 and ask them to send you a copy.

UP TO 5.5 KG

FISHER & PAYKEL PRIDE MW512

Price: \$749

Top loader

This is the best-performing top loader in this size range and is the quietest machine during its spin cycle in the entire table (54 dB). It also has a wash cycle for machine-washable woollens, but like most top loaders it's not the gentlest on clothes.

FISHER & PAYKEL EXCELLENCE GW512

Price: \$859

Top loader

Another new top loader that performs well in this size range, and also the overall second-quietest machine during spin cycles (55 dB), this machine has auto water level and a wash cycle for machine-washable woollens. But being a top loader it's not the gentlest on clothes, and is one of the least energy-efficient in this size range.

6 KG TO 7 KG

BOSCH MAXX 1200 WFO 2460 AU

Price: \$1699

Front loader

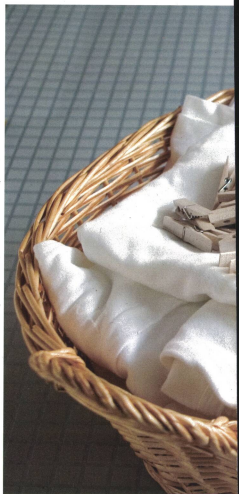
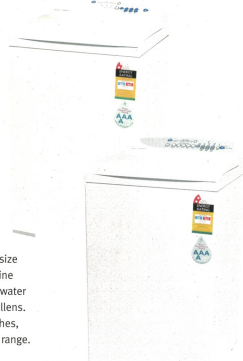
Equal best overall score of the models in this latest test, and equal third-best front loader in this size range. It's also one of the quieter machines tested, is one of the gentlest on clothes, is excellent for energy efficiency and relatively water-efficient. It has a last-program default, a one-touch start, and a wash cycle for machine-washable woollens. However, it didn't do as well as others for rinse performance.

ELECTROLUX JETSYSTEM EW 1280f

Price: \$1219

Front loader

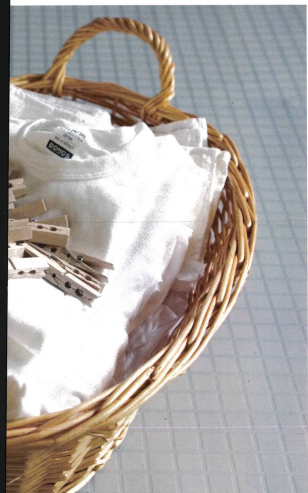
Equal best overall score of the models in this latest test, and equal third-best front loader for this size in the test, this machine is relatively quiet, and is the best of the newly tested models for dirt removal and spin efficiency. It also has last-program default, one-touch start, fast-wash and a wash cycle for machine washable woollens.



How reliable have subscribers found them?

In our 2004 appliance reliability survey, subscribers told us whether their washing machine (bought in or after 1996) had needed repairs in the previous 12 months. Washing machines were one of the more unreliable appliances (15% overall had needed repairing), with front loaders being slightly more likely to need it than top loaders. Most commonly reported were out-of-balance problems.

In the results on the right, differences of 8% or more between brands are meaningful. The numbers in brackets are the number of responses we received for each brand.



PERCENTAGE NOT NEEDING REPAIR

All washing machines (9581)	85
Miele (330)	94
Hitachi (188)	91
Bosch (191)	88
LG (616)	88
Simpson (1092)	88
Maytag (306)	87
Hoover (1255)	86
Westinghouse (176)	86
Fisher & Paykel (2894)	85
Whirlpool (957)	85
Kleenmaid (320)	80
Asko (442)	78
Ariston (158)	73
Bendix (139)	64

NEW WATER LABELLING

From 1 July 2006, newly manufactured washing machines (and dishwashers) will have mandatory water efficiency labels. This star rating supersedes the voluntary 'A' rating scheme, which allows less water-efficient models on the market without labelling.

What will happen in the case of machines manufactured or shipped prior to the July date isn't clear. It's possible they'll be allowed to be sold unlabelled until the existing stock is sold out. So it may take some time before all washing machines and dishwashers are labelled.



NOTES TO THE TABLE OVERLEAF

Square brackets indicate technically similar models.

All the machines do a cold wash except Bosch and Maytag front loaders, whose minimum is 30°C.

Newly tested models.

* All results are for a 'normal' warm wash cycle.

** Dimensions are for the smallest box that fits around the machine, allowing for inlets and drain hoses.

† Warranty conditions vary; check with the manufacturer.

†† Prices are recommended or average retail, as provided by manufacturers in December 2005/January 2006.

ns Not stated.

(A) The motor was modified in August 2005 and the manufacturer advises there is likely to be a mix of older and newer machines in stores. We tested the newer version of the Excellence GW512.

(B) Replaces SW55APP2 (cosmetic differences only).

(C) To be discontinued early 2006 but there may still be stock in some stores.

(D) Discontinued but you may still find it in shops.

(E) To be discontinued in April 2006 but there may be stock available after that.

(F) The manufacturer says it delayed the new motor design, originally scheduled for August 2005. Once it comes in, there will be a mix of new and old models with the same model number in stores.

(G) Replaced by model SW674ASP; you may find both in shops.

(H) Discontinued but will be available in some stores at least until June 2006.

(I) Adds four extra rinses, giving a total rinse cycle of seven.

1 Type

The top-loading machines work via an agitator or an impeller. An agitator sticks up through the centre of the drum from the base and twists and turns the clothes to create movement through the water. Impeller models have an open drum with the impeller at the bottom — it looks like a small bump in the base with ridges that run out from the centre.

Movement is created by the impeller's rotation in the base of the drum, creating turbulence.

2 Overall score

Dirt removal makes up 40% of the overall score — gentleness and spin, water and energy efficiency are each 15%.

Columns 3–8

For what we tested and measured to achieve these scores, see CHOICE, September 2005, or go to www.choiceextra.com.au and click on Sep 05 under 'Washing machines'.

9 Features

For an explanation of these and other useful features, see CHOICE, September 2005, or go to www.choiceextra.com.au and click on Sep 05 under 'Washing machines'.

10 Tap connection

Most machines have both hot and cold-water inlet hoses; some can be connected just to cold water if you only have the one tap (and the machine heats the water) — but they may require a special connector, so ask when buying.

11 Capacity

This is the maximum claimed capacity of dry clothes you can wash. We tested using this claimed capacity.

12 Running costs

This is an estimate of how much it'll cost you over 10 years for water and electricity if you wash the equivalent of one load every day using a 'normal' cycle, based on 15 cents per kWh for electricity and \$1 per 1000 l for water, and including any electricity used when the machine's switched on but not in use.

TEST: Washing machines

PERFORMANCE

Brand / model (in rank order within groups)	1 Type	2 Overall score (%)*	3 Dirt removal score (%)*	4 Gentleness score (%)*	5 Spin efficiency score (%)*	6 Energy efficiency score (%)*	7 Water efficiency score (%)*	7 Water used (L)*	Cyc (min)
UP TO 5.5 KG									
MIELE Novotronic W 502	Front	84	90	70	80	89	80	56	118
ELECTROLUX Inclined Axis EW 1055 F	Front	76	77	70	74	83	75	68	142
# FISHER & PAYKEL Pride MWS12	Top / agitator	68	77	53	74	70	52	131	42
# FISHER & PAYKEL Excellence GW512 (A)	Top / agitator	66	73	57	74	61	52	131	45
SIMPSON Eziset 550 365550L	Top / agitator	65	65	41	72	72	72	77	59
SAMSUNG Triflow SW56APP (B)	Top / impeller	61	78	58	65	33	40	164	70
NEC NW-452	Top / impeller	56	60	58	56	62	36	145	45
6 KG TO 7 KG									
SAMSUNG J1045	Front	81	85	71	76	85	83	60	134
SAMSUNG J845	Front	80	85	71	70	85	83	58	135
AEG Lavamat W1250 Electronic (C)	Front	79	79	73	79	89	76	72	115
# BOSCH Maxx 1200 WFO 2460 AU	Front	79	74	79	76	90	81	61	131
# ELECTROLUX Jetyseton EW 1280F (D)	Front	79	79	77	77	85	75	81	126
# BOSCH Maxx 1000 WFO 2060 AU	Front	78	74	79	74	91	81	62	131
AEG Lavamat W1050 Electronic (C)	Front	77	71	76	82	90	76	71	118
WHIRLPOOL 6th Sense AWM 8121 (D)	Front	77	74	69	85	82	83	60	152
ASKO Quattro W6231 (E)	Front	76	70	74	80	86	78	65	111
ASKO Quattro W6021 (E)	Front	75	70	68	80	87	81	57	108
# ARISTON AVXL 105	Front	74	69	79	68	85	80	71	86
BOSCH Maxx 1000 WFL 2000	Front	74	69	70	73	90	76	77	126
MAYTAG MAF 1300 AAW (D)	Front	72	59	72	79	87	85	51	105
WESTINGHOUSE LT6095 Complete Care	Top / agitator	70	78	50	71	68	71	86	57
FISHER & PAYKEL Excellence GW612 (A)	Top / agitator	68	75	50	81	71	53	154	42
FISHER & PAYKEL Intuitive Eco IW712 (F)	Top / agitator	68	72	42	77	85	58	149	50
# HOOVER 600M Heavy Duty (D)	Top / agitator	66	66	59	68	76	61	118	44
# WHIRLPOOL GALBR6245MW	Top / agitator	66	76	61	57	62	58	127	44
SIMPSON Eziset 605 365605L	Top / agitator	65	65	45	71	74	72	85	61
SAMSUNG Triflow SW66ASP (G)	Top / impeller	63	73	54	58	62	53	153	58
LG WF-T655TH	Top / impeller	60	67	59	56	60	49	165	57
7.5 KG OR LARGER									
ARISTON AVXL 129	Front	77	75	72	74	87	80	76	128
LG WD-1019BD (H)	Front	76	76	68	73	89	77	113	119
FISHER & PAYKEL Intuitive Eco IW812 (F)	Top / agitator	72	74	54	84	86	56	177	54
WESTINGHOUSE LT9555 Complete Care	Top / agitator	69	71	60	75	68	70	141	72
FISHER & PAYKEL Excellence GW712 (F)	Top / agitator	68	69	54	86	72	55	168	45
SIMPSON Eziset 800 225800L	Top / agitator	68	71	42	79	71	71	114	71
SIMPSON Eziset 805 225805L (D)	Top / agitator	68	71	42	79	71	71	114	71
WESTINGHOUSE LT8095 Complete Care	Top / agitator	68	64	58	77	73	72	110	66
# WESTINGHOUSE LT8195	Top / agitator	61	48	73	76	74	54	182	57
WHIRLPOOL GALSC8255MW	Top / agitator	61	62	58	64	64	58	158	40
WHIRLPOOL GALSO8000MW	Top / agitator	61	62	58	64	64	58	158	40
WHIRLPOOL GALSR7244MW	Top / agitator	61	62	58	64	64	58	158	40
# WESTINGHOUSE LT9595	Top / agitator	60	50	68	73	72	54	221	71
MAYTAG Performa PAV 3300 AGW (H)	Top / agitator	56	46	48	69	65	68	130	49

9 FEATURES							SPECIFICATIONS					COSTS		
Delay start (hours)	Woolens / handwash cycle	Out-of-balance correction	Selectable spin speed	Auto-sensing water level	Extra rinse	Water-saver option	10 Tap connection	11 Capacity (kg)	Dimensions (H x W x D, cm)**	Warranty (years)†	Origin	Manufacturer / distributor	12 Running costs (\$ / 10 years)	Price (\$††)
1-24	✓ / ✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		C only	5.5	85 x 60 x 58	2	Germany	Miele	473	1699
	✓ / -	✓	✓	✓	✓		C only	5.5	85 x 60 x 62	2	Italy	Electrolux	671	1109
	✓ / -		✓	✓	✓	✓	H & C	5.5	102 x 56 x 56	2	NZ	Fisher & Paykel	1205	749
	✓ / -	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	H & C	5.5	102 x 56 x 56	2	NZ	Fisher & Paykel	1418	859
1, 3, 9	✓ / -			ns		✓	H & C, C	5.5	101 x 58 x 63	2	Australia	Electrolux	947	669
3-18	✓ / -	ns	✓	✓	✓	✓	H & C, C	5.5	101 x 60 x 66	2	Korea	Samsung	2255	599
2-48	✓ / -	✓		✓			H & C, C	4.5	85 x 53 x 61	2	Korea	NEC	1307	499
3-24	✓ / ✓		✓	✓	✓		C only	7.0	84 x 60 x 55	2	China	Samsung	733	999
3-24	✓ / ✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		C only	7.0	84 x 60 x 55	2	China	Samsung	720	849
	✓ / ✓	ns	✓	✓	✓		C only	6.0	85 x 60 x 60	3	Germany	Andi Co	559	1499
1-19	✓ / -	✓	✓	✓	✓		C only	6.5	86 x 60 x 59	2	Thailand	Bosch	498	1699
1-24	✓ / ✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	C only	6.5	85 x 60 x 63	2	Italy	Electrolux	720	1219
1-19	✓ / -	✓	✓	✓	✓		C only	6.5	86 x 60 x 59	2	Thailand	Bosch	493	1499
	✓ / ✓	ns	✓	✓	✓	✓	C only	6.0	85 x 60 x 60	3	Germany	Andi Co	520	1299
	✓ / ✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	H & C, C	7.0	86 x 60 x 60	2	Italy	Whirlpool	764	1199
Up to 5	✓ / ✓	✓	✓	✓	(J)	✓	C only	6.0	85 x 60 x 59	2	Sweden	Asko	599	1999
	✓ / ✓	✓	✓	✓	(J)		C only	6.0	85 x 60 x 59	2	Sweden	Asko	599	1799
2, 4, 6, 9	✓ / -	✓	✓	✓			H & C, C	7.0	85 x 60 x 57	2	Italy	Arist	746	1099
	✓ / ✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		C only	6.5	86 x 60 x 59	2	Thailand	Bosch	575	1099
Up to 24	✓ / ✓	✓	✓	ns	✓		H & C, C	7.0	85 x 60 x 60	2	UK	Maytag	599	1499
1-23	✓ / -	ns	✓			✓	H & C, C	6.0	103 x 58 x 63	2	Australia	Electrolux	1148	799
1, 3, 9	✓ / -	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	H & C, C	6.5	102 x 60 x 62	2	Australia	Fisher & Paykel	1397	995
0.25-18	✓ / ✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	H & C, C	7.0	101 x 60 x 63	2	Australia	Fisher & Paykel	1027	1185
	✓ / -	✓					H & C	6.0	101 x 58 x 61	2	ns	Electrolux	1062	749
	✓ / -				✓		H & C	6.0	109 x 69 x 65	2	USA	Whirlpool	1464	949
	✓ / -			ns		✓	H & C, C	6.0	101 x 58 x 63	2	Australia	Electrolux	1005	719
3-18	✓ / -			✓	✓		H & C, C	6.5	101 x 69 x 71	1	Korea	Samsung	1685	749
3-48	✓ / -	ns		✓	✓	✓	H & C, C	6.5	93 x 59 x 61	2	Thailand	LG	1763	799
2, 4, 6, 9	✓ / ✓	✓	✓	✓			H & C, C	7.5	85 x 60 x 57	2	Italy	Ariston	748	1549
3-19	✓ / ✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	ns	H & C, C	10.0	109 x 69 x 75	3	Korea	LG	909	1999
0.25-18	✓ / ✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	H & C, C	8.0	100 x 65 x 65	2	NZ	Fisher & Paykel	1169	1285
1-23	✓ / ✓	ns	✓	✓	✓	✓	H & C, C	9.5	107 x 68 x 73	2	Australia	Electrolux	1843	1219
1, 3, 9	✓ / -	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	H & C, C	7.5	100 x 65 x 65	2	NZ	Fisher & Paykel	1563	1075
	✓ / -			ns		✓	H & C, C	8.0	107 x 68 x 73	2	Australia	Electrolux	1430	1009
	✓ / -			ns		✓	H & C, C	8.0	107 x 68 x 73	2	Australia	Electrolux	1430	1109
1-23	✓ / -	ns	✓			✓	H & C, C	8.0	107 x 68 x 73	2	Australia	Electrolux	1338	1059
1-23	✓ / -		✓	✓		✓	H & C	8.0	108 x 67 x 71	2	Australia	Electrolux	1579	1009
	✓ / ✓				✓		H & C, C	7.5	109 x 69 x 65	2	USA	Whirlpool	1752	1049
	✓ / ✓				✓		H & C, C	7.5	109 x 69 x 65	2	USA	Whirlpool	1752	999
	✓ / ✓						H & C, C	7.5	109 x 69 x 65	2	USA	Whirlpool	1752	999
1-12	✓ / ✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	H & C	9.5	109 x 67 x 71	2	Australia	Electrolux	1984	1269
	✓ / -	✓	✓	ns			H & C, C	8.0	112 x 69 x 69	2	USA	Maytag	1685	1299

PICTURE PERFECT

A webcam can be a cheap tool for video messaging and email, but image quality often isn't great.

A web camera attaches to your computer to take video or snapshots that can be uploaded to the web or saved on the computer — or transmitted in real time while you chat online. Web cameras (webcams) also let you make video email or, with the right equipment, video phone calls from your computer.

The Nov/Dec 2005 issue of *Computer CHOICE* compared 11 models. The overall scores ranged from 52–63%, and few rated well for image quality on their default settings.

FEATURE

To shop confidently, you need to know a bit about camera features. The following are some important points.

- Cheap webcams have a picture resolution of about 640 x 480 (about 0.3 megapixels), which is adequate for web, while 1216 x 912 (about 1 megapixel) is sufficient for a small print.
- Consider specs such as the focus range and field of view. A large range means you can take shots at different distances, and the bigger the field of view, the more you can capture in shot. Check how far you

can tilt, rotate and pan the camera. And one-click snapshots using a button on top of the camera (rather than via the computer) are handy.

- Choose a model with adjustable manual focus, exposure and colour balance for the best picture quality.
- If you want voice to go with your image, choose a model with a built-in microphone and audio recording. You can also buy a microphone separately.
- Integrating the web camera with instant messaging software worked better than any of the video chat software that came with the tested models.
- Many web cameras are quite light, so look for a clip to hold it in place.
- Finally, if you can save the files with useful labels and captions you'll be able to locate them easily.

Computer CHOICE, Nov/Dec 2005, has full test results and specifications. If you'd like to subscribe, go to www.choice.com.au/magazines or call 1800 069 552 toll-free.

ON TEST (in rank order)

- LOGITECH QuickCam Pro 4000.
- QUANTUM PC Camera QHM 500LM.
- LOGITECH QuickCam Express.
- VCAM USB 2.0 WebCam CU-2001.
- DICK SMITH ELECTRONICS Internet Camera with Microphone XH5096.
- GENIUS VideoCam Messenger.
- CONNECTLAND USB PC Camera MC-005.
- CREATIVE WebCam Vista Plus VF0090.
- SITECOM Voicecam VP-002.
- SWANN Opti-viewcam USB Webcam.
- AV LABS AVL420 Yak-Pak USB Camera/mike, headphones and PalTalk.

WHAT TO BUY

LOGITECH QUICKCAM PRO 4000

Price: \$200

Good points

- Easy step-by-step installation.
- Easy to tilt (through 85°), and rotates through 360°.
- Autofocus.
- Facial-tracking function (useful for surveillance).

Bad points

- Image quality on default settings rated poor by the viewing panel.
- No clip for use with flat-panel monitors.
- Rotates too easily.
- Stiff manual focus.
- Relatively expensive.



QUANTUM PC CAMERA

Price: \$69

BEST BUY

Good points

- Image quality on default settings ranked third best by the viewing panel (but still suffered from glare and colour changes).
- Easy to tilt (through 110°).

Bad points

- Inaccuracies in the user guide.
- Only clips to thinner flat-panel monitors (clip doesn't open very wide).
- White LEDs on the front come on at lower ambient light levels, which may be annoying.
- Very difficult to adjust focus and rotate (through 360°).



TOASTY DELIGHTS



Four-slice toasters put to the test.

IN A NUTSHELL

You can get a good toaster for around \$35–\$40, but not all the cheaper models perform well.

If you like to cook crumpets and muffins, look for a wide-slot toaster with a self-centring and high-lift mechanism to avoid jamming and make it easier to get them out

You may wonder how many more improvements can be made to this most humble of kitchen appliances. Special functions for toasting crumpets and frozen bread have become increasingly common, not to mention the latest models sporting automatic lowering systems so you don't even need to push down your toast any more.

But do all these fancy features really help you achieve that perfect slice of toast? To find out we tested 15 four-slice toasters ranging in price from \$18 to \$180.

We wanted to know how easy they are to use, how evenly they brown the bread, how consistently they toast slice after slice, how they handle a single slice or frozen bread and the time they take to toast. We also checked how they cope with crumpets and muffins.

VALUE FOR MONEY?

The results were varied, with overall scores ranging from 88% to 59%. Three of our top six models

cost \$40 or less, showing that spending extra money on features that sound useful doesn't necessarily guarantee you better toast.

Our top performer was the **KAMBROOK Wide Slice**. It consistently produced evenly browned toast, whether the bread was fresh or frozen, and it costs just \$35.

However, not all the cheapies performed well. The **MAXIM Kitchenpro** (\$25) and the **HOME COLLECTION** (\$18) are quite difficult to use and present a risk of burnt fingers, with the side walls on both toasters reaching around 130°C, compared to below 68°C on most other models.

Spending a lot on a toaster doesn't guarantee you a good one either. While two of the most expensive models were in the top six, one toaster at \$100 (the **TEFAL Avanti Deluxe**) came second from the bottom.

SINGLE SLICES AND FROZEN BREAD

Four-slice toasters might be great for speeding up the family's breakfast routine, but not all toasted a single slice well. For example:

- The **BREVILLE Freestyle** rated very well overall but only scored 40% when toasting one slice.
- The **TIFFANY Cool Touch** toasted a single slice well but was marked down for throwing the toast out of the carriage when it popped up. This didn't happen when it cooked four slices.
- The **SUNBEAM Café Series** is the only model with a perfect score for the single-slice test.

Evenly cooking frozen bread can also be a challenge for some toasters and generally they didn't toast it as well as fresh bread. On the whole, models with a frozen bread setting toasted it better than those without one, except the **KENWOOD Eon Auto Toast**, which rated equal third in this test without having a special setting.

The top-rated **KAMBROOK** was the only model to manage a perfect score in the frozen bread test.

CRUMPETS AND MUFFINS

The majority of toasters did a reasonable job of cooking crumpets and muffins, but these models didn't quite cut it.

- The **TIFFANY Cool Touch**, **MAXIM Kitchenpro** and **HOME COLLECTION** don't have a high-lift mechanism, so the crumpets and muffins are harder to get out. It's also a little difficult to remove muffins from the **RUSSELL HOBBS** and muffins and crumpets from the **SANYO White Cool Touch**.
- The **BELLINI Stainless Steel** cooks both crumpets and muffins well enough but its high-lift lever to get them out isn't easy to use without burning your fingers.
- The **TEFAL Avanti Deluxe** cooks both crumpets and muffins unevenly.

WHAT TO BUY

KAMBROOK Wide Slice	BEST BUY \$35
KENWOOD Eon Auto Toast	\$152
BREVILLE Emporia	\$90
BREVILLE Freestyle	\$40
SUNBEAM Café Series	\$180
SUNBEAM Quantum Thick & Thin	\$40

There are two qualifications to these recommended models:

- Don't buy the **BREVILLE Freestyle** if you often toast only one slice.
- Don't buy the **SUNBEAM Quantum Thick & Thin** if you often toast frozen bread.

Brand / model (in rank order)*

KAMBROOK Wide Slice KT98

KENWOOD Eon Auto Toast TT980

BREVILLE Emporia CT45B

BREVILLE Freestyle BT905

SUNBEAM Café Series TA9400

SUNBEAM Quantum Thick & Thin 4 TA4400

DELONGHI Metropolis CTM4023

BELLINI Stainless Steel BTT400 (A)

RUSSELL HOBBS Classic Satin 9379

TIFFANY Cool Touch TAT48

HELLER Ultimate Series TAH4S Long Slot

SANYO White Cool Touch SKST4

MAXIM Kitchenpro Four-Up Family Toaster AT-804

TEFAL Avanti Deluxe 532851

HOME COLLECTION HCTA4

PERFORMANCE			COMPONENTS OF TOASTING SCORE			
1 Overall score (%)	2 Ease of use score (%)	3 Toasting score (%)	Repeatability score (%)	Evenness score (%)	Single slice score (%)	Frozen bread score (%)
88	68	96	100	100	70	100
87	84	88	85	100	70	85
85	67	93	100	100	70	85
83	68	89	100	100	40	85
81	70	85	70	100	100	70
79	76	80	85	85	85	50
75	59	82	70	100	70	78
73	67	75	50	100	85	68
69	72	68	70	70	50	78
69	68	69	70	70	50	85
64	56	68	70	60	60	93
63	76	57	70	40	75	50
62	44	69	70	70	60	70
61	59	62	40	70	85	73
59	44	66	70	70	50	60

Profiles

The models in the *What to buy* list are profiled in rank order.

KAMBROOK WIDE SLICE KT98

Price: \$35 **TEST BUY**

Best overall, with an excellent toasting performance. It consistently produces evenly browned toast, and is the only model with a perfect score for toasting frozen bread.

KENWOOD EON AUTO TOAST TT980

Price: \$152

Makes excellent, evenly toasted bread. It's very good for toasting frozen bread and good for a single slice. It's the only model with a bread carriage that lowers and raises itself but it's also the slowest in the test.

BREVILLE EMPORIA CT45B

Price: \$90

Perfect score for producing evenly toasted bread consistently. It's very good for frozen bread and good at toasting a single slice.

BREVILLE FREESTYLE BT905

Price: \$40

Perfect score for producing evenly toasted bread consistently. It's very good at toasting frozen bread, but it's the poorest in the test at toasting a single slice.

SUNBEAM CAFÉ SERIES TA9400

Price: \$180

Produces evenly toasted bread relatively consistently. It's the best model at toasting a single slice and is good for frozen bread. It gently raises the toast when it's ready instead of the usual 'pop' up, but at 5.5 kg it's a heavy toaster.

SUNBEAM QUANTUM THICK & THIN 4 TA4400

Price: \$40

The fastest toaster in the test, it's also very good at making evenly toasted bread consistently and for toasting a single slice, but has the equal lowest score for toasting frozen bread.



Kambrook
Wide Slice



Breville
Freestyle



Kenwood
Eon Auto Toast



Sunbeam
Café Series



Breville Emporia



Sunbeam
Quantum Thick & Thin

Ranking (first 5 sec)	FEATURES											
	Wall / finish	Cord storage	Self-centring	High-lift mechanism	Crumpet setting	Reheat setting	Frozen bread setting	Element off instantly when bread gets stuck	Dimensions (L x D x H, mm)	Warranty (years)	Manufacturer / distributor	Price (\$)**
1	Plastic	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	400 x 180 x 210	1	HWI Electrical	35
2	Aluminium	✓	✓	(B)		✓ (E)	✓	✓	395 x 155 x 190	1	Kenwood / Delonghi	152 (J)
3	Stainless steel	✓	✓	✓	✓ (C)	✓	✓	(G)	285 x 315 x 210	1	HWI Electrical	90
4	Plastic	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	(G)	400 x 160 x 195	1	HWI Electrical	40
5	Stainless steel	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	345 x 255 x 210	1 / 5 (H)	Sunbeam	180
6	Plastic	✓	✓	✓		✓ (F)	✓	✓	400 x 165 x 185	1	Sunbeam	40
7	Steel	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	(G)	310 x 360 x 205	1	Delonghi	149
8	Stainless steel		✓	✓		✓	✓	(G)	300 x 310 x 205	2	Mistral	79
9	Stainless steel	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	(G)	275 x 315 x 215	2	Salton	89 (J)
10	Plastic					✓	✓	(G)	400 x 175 x 190	2	GAF	30
11	Stainless steel	✓	✓	✓	(D)	✓	✓	✓	400 x 175 x 195	2	GAF	50
12	Plastic	✓		✓				(G)	400 x 165 x 195	1	Sanyo	30
13	Steel							(G)	360 x 115 x 160	1	Maxim Housewares	25
14	Stainless steel	✓	✓	✓		✓ (C)	✓ (C)	✓	300 x 280 x 225	1	Groupe SEB	100
15	Steel							(G)	360 x 115 x 160	2	GAF	18

WHAT ABOUT THE REST?

■ The **BELLINI** Stainless Steel and **DE'LONGHI** Metropolis have good overall scores, but you could do better for the price.

■ The **RUSSELL HOBBS** Classic Satin, **TIFFANY** Cool Touch and **HOME COLLECTION** don't handle single slices very well. **HOME COLLECTION** also has a low ease of use score.

■ The **SANYO** White Cool Touch failed to brown evenly and also struggled with toasting frozen bread.

■ The **TEFAL** Avanti Deluxe, **HELLER** Ultimate Series and **MAXIM** Kitchenpro were let down by low scores for ease of use as well as mediocre toasting scores.

What to look for

■ Easy-to-clean toasters have smooth joins and relatively few buttons. While stainless steel might be all the rage, it's difficult to keep fingerprint-free.

■ A removable crumb tray should mean an end to shaking the toaster upside down to clear it of crumbly remains. Look for a tray that slides out easily, unlike the **MAXIM** and **HOME COLLECTION**, which need a screwdriver to remove the tray.

■ A high-lift carriage lever makes it easier to remove small items, such as crumpets and muffins.

■ A wide-slot toaster with a self-centring mechanism is a must for crumpet lovers as it helps ensure they don't jam. It's also good for evenly toasting bread.

FOR PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY

■ None of the tested toasters is ideal for people with a disability, but the **SUNBEAM** Café Series is probably the best. The controls are reasonably well labelled and easy to use. The crumb tray is also easy to remove, but replacing the tray on any model may be difficult for some people. It's also the heaviest toaster tested.

■ People with dexterity problems are likely to have difficulty with the **HOME COLLECTION** and the **MAXIM** Kitchenpro. The controls are difficult to grip, you need a screwdriver to empty the crumb tray, the walls get very hot and there's no high-lift mechanism, so it can be difficult to get the toast out.

* All models are manufactured in China.

** Prices are recommended retail, as provided by manufacturers in November 2005, unless noted.

(A) Discontinued; new model will have a crumpet function.

(B) No, but still easy to remove crumpets and muffins.

(C) For two slots only.

(D) Has a bagel setting that toasts only one side.

(E) Toast placed in warming rack on top of toaster, not in slots.

(F) By using the lowest setting.

(G) Switches off only after carriage rises by approx. 5 mm.

(H) Toaster/element.

(J) The price we paid in August 2005.

1 Overall score

This consists of:

■ Repeatability: 35%

■ Ease of use score: 30%

2 Ease of use score

We rated the ease of cleaning the toaster and crumb tray, and how clearly marked and easy to use the controls are.

3 Toasting score

This consists of:

■ Repeatability: 35%. We assessed how well the toasters could reproduce a target brownness, slice after slice.

■ Evenness: 35%. We assessed how evenly each side of each slice was toasted to the desired colour.

■ Single slice test: 15%. Unevenness can be more of a problem when toasting a single slice (due to increased heat in the centre that would otherwise be absorbed by the other slices.)

■ Frozen bread test: 15%. If you often toast your bread frozen, look for a high score here.

4 Toasting time

The time it took to cook the first four slices of bread, starting from a cold toaster.

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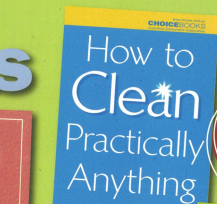
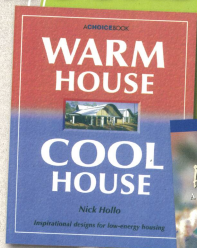
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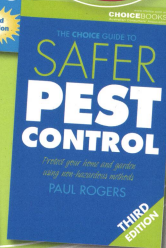
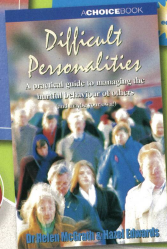
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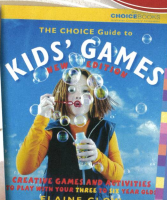
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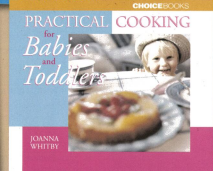
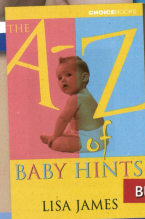
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recalls&bans

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Companies often rent 1800 numbers for a couple of months after a recall is announced. If the number given is no longer operating, phone the manufacturer or retailer direct.

FOOD: Conroy's Smallgoods has recalled all its ready-to-eat meats and smallgoods, excluding bacon, but including MQF 4x4 sliced sandwich ham, sliced Virginia ham, silverside, pepperoni, pizza topping, cocktail frankfurts, bung frits; Foodland picnic ham, Drake ham on the bone, all sizes, and All Seasons ham and picnic ham, sold in the NT, SA and Queensland.

The problem: It may contain *Listeria monocytogenes*, which can cause illness or miscarriage in pregnant women, or illness in young children, the elderly or people with a low immune system.

What to do: Don't eat them. Return them to the place of purchase for a refund.

FOOD: Josephine La Gourmet has recalled Josephine's Hommus Dip, 250 g tub, use-by date 01-March-06, batch code 2911A, sold in Coles and Bi-Lo stores in Victoria.

The problem: It may contain *E coli* bacteria.

What to do: Don't eat it. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund.

CHILDREN'S CLOTHES: Casco Blu has recalled Thomas the Tank Engine two-piece shorts and shirt set, sizes 00-2, keycode 524 8650 (located on the label at the centre back of the waist), and sold in Big W stores from September to November 2005.

The problem: Washing stones in the pockets of the shorts could pose a choking hazard to young children.

What to do: Remove all stones from the shorts pocket and dispose of them carefully, or return the set to your nearest Big W store for a refund. For more information call Casco Blu on (03) 8412 7820, 9 am to 5 pm EDT, Monday to Friday.

CHILDREN'S CLOTHES: The Reject Shop has recalled Romper Santa Suit, infant style, sizes 00-4, product number 21532030, sold in The Reject Shop for \$10.

The problem: The press-stud buttons

may loosen, posing a choking risk. **What to do:** Return it to your nearest Reject Shop for a refund.

TOY: Big Chance has recalled Military Play Set - Police Series No 369 and Police Force No 3911. They're a grey gun with black projectiles with an orange tip, labelled 'Toys and game', and a black and grey gun with grey projectiles with an orange suction tip. **The problem:** They don't meet the requirements of the WA Projectile Toys Order.

What to do: Remove it from the reach of children. Destroy the product or return it to the place of purchase for a refund.

TOY: Dynamic Discounts has recalled Colt's Dart Gun, MK IV No 988 and Yellow and Black Bow and Arrow Set, with foam attachments in a clear hang-sell bag. They were sold since January 2004 in Victoria and WA.

The problem: They contain small parts that pose a choking hazard to young children.

What to do: Return it to the place of purchase for a refund.

TOY: Coles Myer has recalled 'Merry Christmas' 10 inch White Droopy Dog, sold in Coles, Bi-Lo and Pick n' Pay stores. A red 'Merry Christmas' tag swings from the dog's ear.

The problem: The pom-pom attached to the dog's hat doesn't comply with safety standards for children's toys.

What to do: Remove it from the reach of children. Return it to your nearest Coles, Bi-Lo or Pick n' Pay store for a refund, or remove the pom-pom and dispose of it carefully. For more information call 1800 061 562.

CANDLE: Magill Agencies has recalled Beaded Candle Rings, sold in various gift shops between October and December 2005.

The problem: The entire product is flammable.

What to do: Return it to the place of purchase for a refund.

TEALIGHT HOLDER: Country Road has recalled Lucite Square Votive Tealight Holder, a clear Perspex square tealight holder, style number ICAIN158, sold in Country Road Stores in NSW, Queensland, SA, Tasmania, Victoria, WA and New Zealand from July to November 2005.

The problem: Direct contact with the naked flame could cause the tealight holder to melt or cause burn damage. **What to do:** Don't use it. Return it to your nearest Country Road store for a refund or send it to Country Road Head Office, Attn: Customer Service, 658 Church Street, Richmond 3121.

CANDLE HOLDER: Myer has recalled Christmas Candle Holder with Floral Garland, a candle holder with a detachable garland at the base of the candle on top of the candle holder. It sold for \$59.95 and has code number 3293 2041 on the box and on the base of the candle holder.

The problem: The garland may ignite when the candle burns to the base.

What to do: Don't use the candle with the garland attached - the candle and holder can be used without the garland. Return the set or garland only to your nearest Myer store for a refund.

CANDLE: United Global Supplies has recalled Serenity 7 x 5 cm pillar candle surrounded by decorative flowers, in a 15 x 15 x 8.5 cm gift box, or 12 x 12 x 6.5 cm gift box, with product numbers WF5-CL-MGF785RD, WF5-CL-MGF785V, WF5-CL-MGF604RD and WF5-CL-MGF9304V, sold in WA.

The problem: The decorative wreath around the candle isn't fire-retardant and may catch fire.

What to do: Don't use it. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund.

CHRISTMAS LIGHTS: Mayvic has recalled Santa's Emporium lights in the following designs: two kids on a sled-saw, model XM4102; 55 cm reindeer, model XM1326; and 72 cm reindeer, model XM3469. They were sold from late October 2005.

The problem: They pose a risk of electric shock.

What to do: Stop using them. Return them to the place of purchase for a refund, or for more information call NSW (02) 9550 1166, Queensland (07) 3260 1555, Victoria (03) 9555 2522 or SA (08) 8449 4938.

TOWEL RAIL: Skope Industries has recalled Skope Electrically Heated Ladder Towel Rail, models LTR 7946C, LTR 7960C, LTR 4352C and LTRM 7952C, produced between June and November 2005 with serial numbers from FF23213 to FK40359. The model and serial numbers are printed on the rating label adjacent to the bottom rung of the rail.

The problem: The insulation of the supply cord may be compromised during installation, posing an electrocution risk.

What to do: Stop using it. Call 1800 121 535 during business hours or email recall@skope.com.au with 'LTR Product Recall' in the subject line, to arrange for repair.

LPG hose: Eaton Fluid Power has recalled Weathered LPG fuel assembly hose, H36206-250R, used in LPG assemblies and LPG conversions. It was sold as bulk hose in full roll lengths and made-to-order hose assemblies.

The problem: The wall thickness of the hose varies, which may result in a fuel leak.

What to do: If you've had an LPG conversion since 23 September 2005, arrange to have an inspection by the original installer, or for more information call 1800 782 142 between 9 am and 4:30 pm EDT.

MOZZIE ZAPPER: Indent Products has recalled Southern Cross and IP Australia S110 Mozzie Zapper.

The problem: It doesn't comply with Australian standards.

What to do: Stop using it immediately, and return it to the place of purchase for a refund.

aboutchoice

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HOW TO USE THIS INDEX

Bold type indicates a test, survey or trial report, normal type indicates other articles.

* indicates an update of a previous report, additions or corrections to reports, small follow-up items, letters or recalls.

For space reasons, the index generally doesn't include Choice Cuts and other small pieces.

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Toasters, four-slice **Mar**
Trans fat **Apr**
Tyres **Mar**

Vacuum cleaners **Jul, Sep*, Jan/Feb**
Video equipment
camcorders **Dec**
DVD recorders **Aug, Nov***
Vinegar, balsamic **Nov**
VoIP phone calls **Apr**

Washing machines **Sep, Mar**
Washing powder **May**
Water, bottled **Jul, Nov***
Web cameras **Mar**
Wine, red **Dec**

COUNCIL MEMBERS

The Australian Consumers' Association is governed by an honorary council elected by the voting members. (For information about voting membership, call (02) 9577 3399.) Members of the council give their time without reimbursement, and are not engaged as principals in industry, advertising or sales.

COUNCIL: Chair: Jan McClelland.

Members: Robin Brown, Cynthia Cliff, Chris Field, Dianne Hill, Jenni Mack, Phil Marchionni, Joan Staples, John T D Wood.

Throw another corpse on the barbie?

Our reader was shocked to read on the label what this box from **BUNNINGS** contained. All she'd wanted was a barbeque...

BUNNINGS

BODY
IN THIS BOX

This BBQ consists of 2 boxes

The more things
change, the
more they stay
the same...

And the exact saving here
would be...?

ROLLBACK

SCHWEPES TONIC
WATER 1.25L

Was **1.39** now **1.39** ea



THIS GIVES A WHOLE NEW
MEANING TO SEAFOOD
EXTENDER...

Reader Gerry Rew reckons these seafood snacks
might be past their use-by date.

READY TO EAT
SINCE 1893



- 2 in 1 Exchangeable Grass Shear and Hedge Trimmer Blades. For increased versatility.
- Shearing Blade. For trimming a variety of foliage.
- Trimming Blade. For pruning and hedging.
- Removable Telescopic Extension Handle with Remote Switch. Adjusts the height of the user no need to bend down.

This multipurpose trimmer
promises to cut you down
to size!

Trim a few inches off the grass, the hedge, the rose bushes... and, with the extension (sic) handle, yourself.

SNOWGUM WARHOUSE CLEARANCE

MORE STOCK ON SITE - ALL REDUCED TO CLEAR!

You'll need to fight for these bargains!

A warhouse clearance — but no ammo, camouflage gear, or bomber jackets on sale?



Any idiot can
do this job!

A simple, accurate fool that can pinpoint electrical problems for you
Tester includes all tools to install spark plugs

HOW ABOUT A LITTLE HELP?

The prize for the best entry goes to T Bode. Thanks also to C Cotterill, L Curran, P Kesteven, G Rew and R Starkey for their contributions to this month's *Hard Word*. Please keep them coming.

If you have any examples you think deserve to be on this page, send them to *The Hard Word*, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204. **Please don't email us your entries — we need the originals.**